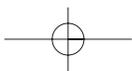
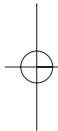
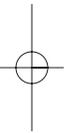
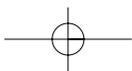
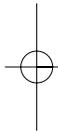
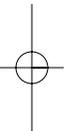
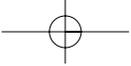


Di ki manera?





Di ki manera?

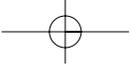
A Social History of Afro-Curaçaoans, 1863-1917

**Di ki manera? Historia sosial di Afro-Kurasoleñonan, 1863-1917
(ku un resúmen na Papiamentu)**

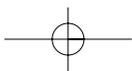
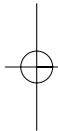
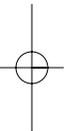
**Hoe doen we het? Een sociale geschiedenis van de Afro-Curaçaoënaars, 1863-1917
(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)**

**Proefschrift ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor aan de Universiteit Utrecht op
gezag van de rector magnificus, prof.dr. W.H. Gispen, in gevolge het besluit van het
college voor promoties in het openbaar te verdedigen
op vrijdag 16 maart 2007 om 14.30 uur**

**door Rose Mary Allen
geboren op 25 december 1950 te Curaçao, Nederlandse Antillen**

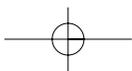
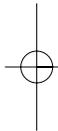
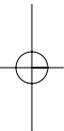
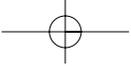


promotor: Prof.dr. G.J. Oostindie



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CHAPTER I

Introduction

In this study I will present the key factors determining the social and cultural life of Afro-Curaçaoans during the first fifty years after the abolition of slavery in 1863. I will do so through a socio-cultural analysis of the social system of which they formed part. Their position within slave society will be the starting point, followed by an evaluation of the two principle elements of social control after emancipation: the State and the Roman Catholic Church. Rather than viewing Afro-Curaçaoans as mere objects to be acted upon, in this analysis I cite them as resilient agents, rising to – and often resisting in a variety of ways – the challenges and restrictions they faced in a free society. Their resilience and resistance are best demonstrated through the factors from which they drew their sustenance; these being mainly their social networks – such as families, peer groups, co-workers, local communities – and their culture, brought to the fore, for example, in their songs, stories and rituals.

This thesis will put forward a historical study of post-abolition social and cultural life of Afro-Curaçaoans within the context of the late nineteenth-century Curaçaoan socio-economic system. It thus looks at their social and cultural life from a historical perspective and in doing so it combines history and anthropology. Anthropologists have been known to study the culture of non-western people through extensive fieldwork, documenting the ethnographic present of societies.¹ Anthropology has therefore often been criticized for its a-historical approach. At the moment historical anthropology, an interdisciplinary exchange between anthropology and history, tries to fill this void. And there are more studies focusing on social change within society and on the role socially marginalized people play in these processes of change (Burke 1996:49). In the past three decades anthropologists studying the Caribbean have joined historians and specialists in creole languages and literature to analyse how ordinary people in this region have experienced the processes of culture brought about by colonization, slavery, indenture and neocolonialism (Besson 2002:5-6).

The title of this thesis, *Di Ki Manera?* (In Which Manner?), is also the title of a traditional song in which an enslaved person contemplates a world which denies him any respect. In this context I use it to analyse how Afro-Curaçaoans struggled in their day-to-day lives after emancipation. Here, the lives of ‘those without history’ will be told (Wolf 1982). Due to the lack of written documents on this subject, I will also utilize oral information. In addition I hope to illustrate through this approach how oral sources can be applied to historical studies. Thus my goal is partly of a methodological nature.

In attempting to gain insight into Afro-Curaçaoan life after slavery, it is important to look at change and continuity over time with regard to culture and to examine the role

Afro-Curaçaoans played in this process of change. Of major significance to this study is the view of culture and society as dynamic and subject to change. Curaçaoan culture has changed in complex ways over time, the abolition of slavery being a pivotal point in this process. At the time of abolition freedmen and their offspring constituted around fifty per cent of the island population.² They were joined by a group of roughly 35 per cent of the population who experienced life for the first time as free citizens (Oostindie 1995b:158; 1997:56). In this respect, Curaçao differed from the rest of the Caribbean, where the proportion of freedpeople was much lower prior to emancipation.³

Caribbean historiography has rarely focused on life following this transformation. Most studies have concentrated on slavery and have neglected freedom. With this they have also neglected the role played by those manumitted in the processes of change (Eudell 2002:7; Cooper et al. 2000). This also applies to Curaçaoan historiography. This study follows the cultural path through slavery and into freedom, and in this way aims to give a more complete history. It examines the everyday life of Afro-Curaçaoans in the period between 1863, the year of emancipation, and 1917, the year of the first mass labour migration of Curaçaoans to Cuba, with profound effects on the social structure of the island. The end-date of my research is thus not 1915, the year in which the establishment of Shell on the island triggered the beginnings of an industrialized society. The oil-refinery did not have an immediate effect on the daily life of a large group of Afro-Curaçaoans (van Soest 1977; Paula 1973).

In this first Chapter I will lay out the theoretical framework of this study. After an analysis of the way in which previous historical studies have viewed the lives of Afro-Curaçaoans, I will advocate a more historically oriented anthropological approach. 'Culture' will be a key concept in this socio-cultural analysis of life in post-emancipation society. As this study aims to combine anthropology and history, I will look at several theoretical concepts that have shaped the understanding of Caribbean culture and society.

This analysis of Afro-Curaçaoan culture and daily life during the first fifty years following emancipation necessitates the use of a wide range of sources. The complexity of the Afro-Curaçaoan past will be interpreted through oral testimonies, archival documents and secondary sources. In Chapter II, I will assess the methodology and sources, both oral and written, utilized in this study.

Chapter III will examine and describe the daily life of Afro-Curaçaoans before 1863. Since this pre-emancipation period has determined many of the group's characteristics, it is vital to study this group before 1863. Here the main question is: 'Who are we referring to with the term "Afro-Curaçaoans"?' This social category is complex and varied. Afro-Curaçaoans have been distinguished according to their ancestral origins, gender, age, occupation and area of domicile. But distinction has also been made according to whether a person had been born on the island or had been transported there, and to whether they were freed or enslaved. All these factors would determine their place in slave society and how this was to continue or change in the post-emancipation period.

Chapter IV focuses on the manner in which emancipation was perceived by those in control and by those gaining freedom. I will analyse how the perceptions of both groups would influence the lives of the manumitted former slaves. Central in gaining an insight into these perceptions are the speeches made and the songs sung on the day of emancipation.

In Chapters V and VI I will identify the different roles played by the authorities in their attempts to mould the life patterns of Afro-Curaçaoans during their first few decades of freedom. Chapter V places emphasis on the key concept of ‘civilization’ and on how this has been interpreted and applied by the State in its attempts to shape the Afro-Curaçaoans as free citizens – including those manumitted before 1863. Chapter VI will approach this issue from the perspective of the Roman Catholic Church, with its emphasis on ‘civilization’ and ‘respectability’ and its attention directed to social spheres such as sexuality and family life.

Chapters VII, VIII and IX will examine the range and complexity of the actual lives of Afro-Curaçaoans arising from the interventions by the State and the Church. In this thesis I will approach Afro-Curaçaoan culture empirically, by examining three central aspects of their everyday lives: the economic, the social and the spiritual. Using the concept of *bida* in these three Chapters, I will focus on the dynamics of their material, social and spiritual lives. *Bida* simply means life. This concept is, however, often used in connection with the different aspects of people’s daily lives.

In Chapter VII I will first address the material (economic) dimension, as expressed in the term ‘buska bida’. In 1863 Afro-Curaçaoans had the option to either continue or change their socio-economic situation. The possibilities open to them were similar to those freed before emancipation; they could continue in certain types of work, to which other jobs were added. Although ‘buska bida’ encompasses all economic modes undertaken by people in order to make a living, it is not restricted to material existence. It is also associated with the struggle for survival in a rigid hierarchical society where Afro-Curaçaoans, being the descendants of slaves, have inherited an inferior social status. In that sense the term ‘buska bida’ also embodies the search for acceptance and recognition.

Chapter VIII, *Biba un Bida Drechi* (Living a Respectable Life), addresses the Roman Catholic Church’s quest to civilize Afro-Curaçaoans, as described in Chapter VI. It focuses on the ways in which people responded to the goals set by this institution. I will examine how Afro-Curaçaoans lived together and interacted as a couple or as individuals of either sex.

Finally, in Chapter IX, *Tambú di Bida* (Drum of Life), I will analyse the beliefs through which people attempted to explain their place in the world and their outlook on life. These beliefs also determined the decisions people made on a day-to-day basis. Although initially I will address each of these three aspects of life in separate Chapters, they are related in the Afro-Curaçaoans’ struggle to make life bearable – there is thus an interrelationship between material, social and spiritual life.

In Chapter X I will summarize and conclude this thesis and reflect on the fundamental underlying ideas with regard to the life of Afro-Curaçaoans in post-emancipation Curaçao. Emphasis will be placed on the model of cultural complexity and its manifestation in the Afro-Curaçaoans’ everyday lives.

Historiography of Post-Emancipation Curaçao

In a review of the historiography of the British Leeward Islands’ post-emancipation era B.W. Higman (1995:10) divided this period into three main phases. During the first phase the historiography was recorded by the writings of amateurs, who were either local

inhabitants or visitors. These amateurs were superseded in the second phase (first half of the twentieth century) by professional historians from metropolitan Europe and the United States. The last phase began in 1950 and was characterized by the work of West Indian professionals as well as by contributions from British and American scholars. Most of the West Indian historians had studied at universities in their respective countries and offered interesting alternatives to mainstream historical writing of the time, both in their perspectives and methods.

In some ways the historiography of Curaçao runs parallel to that of the Anglophone Leeward Islands, as they both evolved from amateurism to professionalism in this period (Oostindie 1987; 1997:27).⁴ Yet in other ways it presents a different historical panorama. In contrast to the British Leeward Islands – where there has been a greater involvement by local scholars – a large part of the studies on Curaçaoan history is still produced by Dutch historians (Oostindie and Hoefte 1999). The relatively small number of inhabitants when compared to the British West Indies and the lack of an appropriate infrastructure on the island impede local initiatives in this area.

Nevertheless, the body of historical literature of Curaçao has been growing steadily over the past decades. The late twentieth-century developments in historiography in general have been supported by scholars studying the history of Curaçaoan society. Their writings show a new orientation in the areas, the time covered and the subject matters. There has also been an expansion in the fields of studies. This manifests itself particularly in the focus on the manner in which the populace thought and behaved.

Within the context of this new orientation, a more comprehensive study on how the former slaves dealt with their lives after emancipation has become necessary. While in other areas of the Caribbean studies of everyday life in the post-emancipation era are slowly shedding their outdated interpretations, this is not yet the case for the Netherlands Antilles. Here I will therefore seek to situate these studies within the context of the general historiography of Curaçao.

First of all I date the beginning of the post-emancipation historiography at 1863, the year in which, as previously stated, the enslaved on Curaçao were freed. Around the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, post-emancipation literature matched a current of thought in historiography which was overtly Eurocentric or, as the historians De Jong, Prince and s'Jacob (1998) called it, 'Netherlandocentric'.⁵ Historiography was essentially a narrative on Dutch activities in the Caribbean: it focused primarily on Dutch explorations, the subsequent struggles and rivalry between the Netherlands and other European powers, and the Netherlands' final conquests in this area. This Eurocentric approach was not only visible in the areas of study, but also in the questions raised and in the interpretations made. At that time the model of the law of evolution, which sees social change as a development in the stages from savagery to barbarism to civilization, was applied to all areas of science. Differences in technological development were linked to differences in intellectual capacities between races. In this concept of a racial hierarchy, blacks were placed at the lowest level of development. The race issue was also applied to the historiography of Curaçao and several scholars interpreted themes such as slavery and its abolition from this particular philosophical viewpoint (Oostindie 1995b:153-69).

These ideas are clearly present in the works of J.H.J. Hamelberg. Although not a professional historian, Hamelberg was considered a leading light of his time. He lived on the island at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century and published several studies (1895, 1896, 1901-1903a, 1901-1903b, 1903).⁶ Hamelberg was a major force behind the creation of a Society for History⁷, in which he played a pivotal role once established. The Society would publish six reports but folded once he left for the Netherlands.

According to Hamelberg, blacks were not equal to whites. His publications on slaves and former slaves clearly illustrate his ideas on racial and cultural inferiority. Hamelberg's convictions also came to the fore in *Vragen van de dag* (1895b), in which he stated that the black popular class should not have the right to vote. In a different essay (1895a) he further elaborated upon these views and cited the high number of babies born out of wedlock among blacks and their use of the Papiamentu language as hindrances in their development. In many ways his ideas ran parallel to those of the English theologian Anthony Trollope (1860) and the historian James Anthony Froude (1888), whose books reinforced the stereotypes of the plantocracy in the British West Indies. Clearly, at that time these were commonly held ideas regarding blacks in the Caribbean.

Up until the mid-nineteen sixties the area of history receiving most attention by scholars and laymen alike was that of colonial administration. The body of literature on this subject is considerable.⁸ The historiography on the islands was principally a description in chronological terms, focusing on influential men.

Interesting in this development of chronological historiography are the contributions in the beginning of the twentieth century of local people such as Wein Hoyer and Nicolaas van Meeteren.⁹ Because of the extensive documentation he held relating to Curaçao, Hoyer was approached whenever information on the island's history was needed. He was also one of the first historians to write in Papiamentu.¹⁰ Van Meeteren, whose family (originally from the Netherlands) had been on the island for three generations, was also seen as a knowledgeable person regarding the island's history.¹¹ Both Hoyer and van Meeteren represented the interests of local people in their history. Their works, however, followed the traditional concept of history as they represent descriptive accounts of events and focus on powerful men.

This trend continued in the in the mid-twentieth century with the writings of the professional historian Johan Hartog. Not confining himself to political issues, Hartog covered various other areas, thus disclosing a collection of facts from different archives in the Netherlands and in the Netherlands Antilles. His works are encyclopedic in character, but regretfully his large compilations of facts are not always sufficiently contextualized. Furthermore, in Hartog's works the populace is only fleetingly mentioned. In that sense he perpetuates the traditional method of exploring history. Although his main study on Curaçao (2 vols. 1961) comprises 1109 pages, the Chapter on slavery and emancipation consists of a meagre 34 pages. The rare mention of slaves throughout this book is exclusively coupled to occasions where they pose a threat to the established order. The post-emancipation period is almost entirely overlooked in Hartog's writings.

Another current flowing through the historiography of Curaçao, running parallel to politics, is that of the Roman Catholic Church – one of the earliest institutions to document the

history of the Netherlands Antilles. In addition to preaching the gospel to the black lower classes, some priests published historical books and articles. Most of their writings came to light at the beginning of the twentieth century. Priest-historians such as Petrus A. Euwens and in the mid-fifties M.D. Latour and W.M. Brada, being prolific writers, penned numerous publications.¹²

Among these studies were biographies on leaders of the Catholic Church in the Dutch Caribbean. For example, several life-histories were written on Martinus Niewindt, a priest who had arrived on the island in 1824. When Niewindt became the first vicar apostolic in 1843, the Church intensified its mission on the Dutch islands. Niewindt introduced a modernized medical system and was active in improving education opportunities for children of the black popular class. His role in the local expansion of the Catholic Church has been acknowledged in many forms.¹³ G.J.M. Dahlhaus (1924) is worthwhile mentioning in this respect as he published some of Niewindt's correspondences in one of his books.

However, most of these studies undertaken by the clergy were descriptive evaluations of the Roman Catholic missionary role in Antillean society and focused on the positive contributions made by the Church in the development of the islands and the problems they encountered. This corresponds with the Church's ideas on the role history should play in education. Historiography by priests is thus limited to the history of Christianity. This vision – 'History education should be the history of civilization, hence first of all the history of Christianity'¹⁴ – is portrayed in several studies on the history of Curaçao.

Yet others have approached religious history from a different viewpoint. The late twentieth-century publications by R.H. Nooyen, for example, do not only focus on religious leaders but also on members of the popular class who played an important role in the Catholic Church (Nooyen 1959, 1974, 1979, 1995). A more analytical study of missionary work is Cornelis Goslinga (1956), in which the author discusses the numerous difficulties faced by the Church when introducing Christianity to the slaves.

Harry Hoetink's dissertation, a sociological-historical study published in 1958, pioneered a new phase in the historiography of the Netherlands Antilles. To date, this book is regarded as the standard work for social scientists and historians alike.¹⁵ It represents a shift toward sociology and reflects the rising interest in giving social questions a more historical perspective. It also marks the beginning of a conceptualization of the historical reality of the island in sociological terms. Hoetink went beyond looking solely at events – as historians had been doing previously – and examined the complex organization of Curaçaoan society before 1863. He looked at how colour, race and ethnic origin, as well as the inherent powers, determined a person's position in the social hierarchy. He examined how this determined the ways in which ethnic groups lived – independently – as well as how they interacted (I will elaborate on this later in this Chapter).

With this, Hoetink laid the foundations for a better understanding of a society emerging from slavery. In his following work (1962) he compared the bipolar race relations in the British colonies to the far more flexible ones in the Spanish territories, in order to theorize on colour and race sensitivity in the Caribbean.¹⁶ Hoetink questioned whether race relations and the nature of slave systems in the Caribbean were exclusively and uniformly culturally determined. He substantiated his views in a comparison of slavery and race relations in Suriname and in Curaçao. He also launched the concepts of 'somatic norm image'

(the way in which several groups in Caribbean society valorize colour and race) and 'somatic distance', referring to how people experience differences between the valued somatic features and their real physical appearance (Oostindie 1996).

The Curaçaoan sociologist René Römer would continue to stimulate the interest in social issues in his dissertation (1979). He further examined the social changes on the island over a period of four hundred years and sustained Hoetink's theory that colour, race and ethnicity were important determinants of one's social position, both before and after slavery. According to Römer, this only changed to some extent with industrialization. Due to the consequent structural changes in Curaçaoan society, colour and race became to a lesser degree obstacles for social mobility.

The rising interest in social and economic issues manifested itself in new studies using models and paradigms drawn from scholarly traditions. Most of these works focused on demography and economics (Higman 1985-1986:3). J. van Soest (1977) addresses the macro socio-economic impact of the oil-refinery on twentieth-century Curaçaoan society.¹⁷ He also discusses the economic situation of post-emancipation society before the arrival of Shell, including the economic opportunities open to Afro-Curaçaoans during that period.

A rare demographic study was published by H.E. Lamur (1981), which quantifies and compares the birth rates of the slave population in the Netherlands Antilles and Suriname.¹⁸ W.E. Renkema (1981a) pursued the rising interest in economic questions and explored the range of economic activities on Curaçaoan plantations in the nineteenth century through the use of primary sources, such as the property records of plantation owners. Even though he examined to some extent the owners' powers with respect to pre- and post-emancipation plantation life and looked at the barriers set up by them to obstruct the establishment of black lower class communities in their neighbourhoods, he paid relatively little attention to the development and the position of the peasantry on and outside of the plantations.¹⁹

Jeroen Dekker (1982) compared the social situation on the island in the period before and after the arrival of Shell in 1915. He used quantitative measures to analyse the demographic, economic and social processes taking place over a period of almost three decades. Dekker drew on population records to reassess the validity of certain observations made by previous scholars. He concurred that after the arrival of Shell, Curaçao changed from an agrarian-commercial society into a modern capitalistic industrial society with improved socio-economic conditions and the possibility of upward social mobility. Based on statistics, this study provides new insights into the social processes during the final phase of the pre-industrial period.

In the late twentieth-century religious historiography of the island a new process challenged the dominant views in this area. Some authors became more critical of the role played by the Catholic Church in Curaçaoan society. Armando Rudy Lampe's dissertation (1988) locates at the end of slavery, both slaves and the freed population of Curaçao within the contours of the power struggle between the Roman Catholic Church and the State. This critical approach is also reflected in the book edited by B. Boudewijnse et al. (1992) and coordinated by the priest and scholar J.M. Schoffeleers. This study examines the role of the Catholic Church in the specific areas in which it has been influential in the lives of the popular class.

Amado Römer (1984) assesses the contribution of the Church in the area of social well-being and labour unions. Aart Broek (1990) focuses on themes such as the influence of the Catholic Church on the popular class literature development in early twentieth-century Curaçao. No studies addressed, however, the syncretic character of the traditional religious beliefs and practices of the slaves and manumitted former slaves.

The new, sociological approach to history also led to a focus on the activities of women, who for long had been of peripheral interest to historians. Towards the end of the twentieth century this reassessment resulted in research on women's contributions to the history of Curaçao. As a group, women had not been recognized sufficiently in historical writings. In this sense, these scholars joined the worldwide feministic approach to history aimed at debunking preconceptions and paradigms based on gender prejudice.²⁰

On Curaçao the pioneering study by the historian Nolda Römer-Kenepa (1980) was one of the first to focus on Curaçaoan women under slavery for analysis. She compared the different ways in which they were socially placed in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Curaçao. In addition to slavery, gender to a large extent determined their lives. This twofold hindrance was transferred to their freed descendants. Apart from gender discrimination they were subjected to prejudices based on their colour and class. In this context of growing awareness of women's histories, the reader *Mundu yama sinta mira* (1992) must also be mentioned here, as it contains abridged versions of studies on Curaçaoan women's history.²¹

In the search for a redefinition and reassessment of women's role in society, the labour history of women has received far more attention than any other subject in the new women's historiography. Annemiek van der Veen's study (1984) on the making of straw hats on Curaçao and Bonaire rose from this interest. Through making straw hats, women acquired an extra income for their families, thus enhancing their independence. In this light van der Veen's research also provides a valuable insight into women's activities after emancipation. However, much more research challenging the existing assumptions about gender-relationships in society remains to be done, starting with the rewriting of the aforementioned studies by male scholars, who have paid little attention to the gender issue. More research is required on the role of the freed and enslaved women as labourers, mothers and partners, and as carriers of ideas. Children, handicapped people and the elderly are neglected groups also requiring further investigation.

The reassessment of history by local scholars and amateurs intensified from the 1960s onwards, and would give extra attention to Afro-Curaçaoans in history. This process went hand in hand with the issue of identity of the black popular class, which took place around the same time as part of a larger international social movement in which people questioned the existing political and social order. This renewed historical awareness manifested itself on different levels. It made clear, for instance, the necessity of the establishment of a local archive where relevant documents for the study of history can be preserved and consulted. It also led to several movements aimed at commemorating significant historical dates.²² Principally, the slave revolt of 17 August 1795 received much attention. This revolt had been spearheaded by among others the slaves Tula and Karpata, in a bid to highlight the necessity of improving the social conditions of slaves. In an effort to reassess events and groups excluded from history, this rebellion took the limelight and was considered a

pivotal point in slave history, not dealt with sufficiently or objectively in the existing historiography.

The rising interest for this aspect of history coincided with a call for the re-examination of existing publications regarding this particular event. Several books were published, such as Hartog (1973) on Tula: a result of governmental attention to this subject. A year later A.F. Paula (1974), the then director of the Central Historical Archive in Willemstad, made public the official documents on this event.²³ The reassessment of one's place in history led to another theme, which Paula (1967) had already addressed. In this work he raised the issue of self-awareness and looked at the issue of identity and identity-formation within the Afro-Curaçaoan group. He discussed the problem of how Afro-Curaçaoans tended to internalize the standards for self-judgement set by the white elite in society, and their consequent self-denial (Paula 1967:31-2).

The silence surrounding this part of history is a phenomenon still present. It was not until 1984 that the date of the 17 August 1795 slave revolt was institutionalized as a day of remembrance. And this only occurred after the *Komishon di Koordinashon 17 di augustus* had cited this as its main objective. This officialization required that institutions such as schools and the Ministry of Culture recognize this day. However, this has not led to any in-depth historical study being initiated by the government. When in the 1980s and 1990s society was challenged by economic problems, a soaring crime wave and a disenfranchised youth, consecutive cabinets neglected the importance of history and concentrated instead on practical solutions for these problems. This corresponds with the prevailing general lack of interest in history (Huender 1993). However, in non-governmental areas certain activities did continue. The establishment in 1999 of the African museum 'Kurá Ulanda' in Otrobanda (Willemstad) has also led to a new phase in the stimulation of awareness in the subjects of slavery and freedom. This museum introduces schoolchildren to African cultures and the history of slavery. Annually a tour is organized by the *Komishon Lucha di Libertat (Ruta Tula)* in cooperation with the National Archives, visiting the principal locations where the uprising of 1795 occurred.

New research methods, moreover, have been explored in the process of a re-examination of history, presenting subjects previously neglected or unknown. An example of this is the use of the archeological excavation, alongside the application of scientific techniques such as carbon dating. In this way important information is gathered on artifacts, regarding their age, origin, manufacture and function in society. At the moment archeological studies are being performed in the Caribbean to reveal more about the slaves' ways of life and to link these to past cultures in Africa. On Curaçao, the archeologist Jay Havisser has dealt with this aspect in his study (1987) on the basis of archeological fieldwork.²⁴ In a later study with co-author E.D. Antoin from Bonaire, they studied the 'kas di palu di maishi' of Curacao and the 'kas di bara' of Bonaire by comparing their structures, materials, construction forms and spatial use. They concluded that the differences have to do with the nature of the European-African cultural contacts on each of the islands (Havisser and Antoin 2003).

The method of oral history has also been used to further study and document what people were able to remember of slavery and the period afterwards. Examples are Martinus (1996), Rutten (1989), Lampe (1988) and Rosalia (1997), who all utilized oral sources

in their studies. Frank Martinus used these sources and deciphered a long time extinct language, *Guene*, in order to access its linguistic contribution to Papiamentu. A.M.G. Rutten gave a cultural dimension to his study of medical history by using oral sources (1989) and A. Lampe analysed the extent of protest and resistance by slaves to the system by means of Ananzi stories (1988).

While Lampe, Rutten and Martinus used oral sources collected by others, and thus depended on how well these collectors had researched their data, René Rosalia's dissertation on the popular custom of the *tambú* was drawn from interviews he himself had conducted with people knowledgeable on this subject. His pioneering book (1997) analyses the persistence of the *tambú*, despite its persecution by the State and Church.²⁵ With this publication Rosalia gives evidence that the black popular class possessed a deep power of cultural resistance, and because of this, it also played an important role in the shaping of Curaçaoan culture. In 2004 Leon Weeber published the life history of Bubuchi Doran, who recalled his life on the plantation Savaneta. The historiography regarding Afro-Curaçaoans is thus still burgeoning and there is need for more comprehensive studies on how they lived. In addition, the post-emancipation period has also been relatively neglected in Curaçaoan historiography.

Most scholars have either dealt with slavery or have leapt from slavery to the post-1917 industrial period. In this respect Curaçaoan historiography shares a fate similar to the rest of the Caribbean, where the focus has generally been on slavery rather than on the subsequent freedom. Karen Fog Olwig questions this imbalance by stating that 'if we define emancipation in the sense as free from constraint, control or the power of another it is not easy to see how the abolition of slavery gave West Indians of African descent true emancipation' (1995c:3). Or, as Rebecca Scott argued in her study on post-emancipation:

when one wants to formulate a research design for work on the aftermath of emancipation, the question arises: what exactly should one do with this insight about behaviour, this realization that slave emancipation was neither a transcendent liberation nor a complete swindle, but rather an occasion for reshaping – within limits – social, economic and political relationships? (1988:408)

The findings of the few studies which have dealt with emancipation on Curaçao underscore the ambivalent situation as described in both statements. Several works show that the major institutions in society did not change with the end of slavery. Ethnic relationships based on colour and race remained an obstacle for social mobility, impeding the manumitted from breaking through in the existing power structure, where plantation owners and others struggled until the end of the nineteenth century to remain in control. Former slaves and their children continued to live in poverty, constantly seeking employment opportunities, either on existing plantations, in towns, or through emigration (Römer 1979; Renkema 1981a:179-84; Oostindie 1997).

Life after emancipation cannot be merely examined on the basis of elite renderings of this past. One should not underestimate the complexity of this past and the active role of Afro-Curaçaoans in the process. As W. Marshall states, if we are 'to determine the meaning of freedom in terms of social relations, consciousness and cultural activity, we should

not only look at the legislation, but also at choices people made which influenced their actions and responses in their life' (1993:12).

Studying post-emancipation life of Afro-Curaçaoans is justified as D. Eudell stated: 'events during the post-slavery era, beginning with the way in which emancipation was conceptualized and then later implemented, bear some direct relation, conceptual as well as institutional, to the contemporary conditions with which the descendants of slaves remain confronted' (2002:7).

At the moment of freedom a large part of society ceased to be the property of others. Freedom, however, was not merely a change in legal status. It also delineated the foundation for the existence of new community of people who within the constraints placed on them by the ruling class had to define a new way of life for themselves as free citizens (Brereton, 1999). It meant freedom of choice and greater possibilities to exercise their capacities to deal with persisting social constraints. Their resilience and the various creative ways in which they skilfully dealt with the obstacles placed in their path, is at the heart of this study.

A Turn towards Culture in Caribbean Historiography

As previously stated, in this thesis the key concept is culture. An important contribution of anthropology to scholarly debates has been the fact that culture no longer is considered something only pertaining to the elite group. After Edward B. Tylor (1871) in the nineteenth century defined culture in a broader anthropologist sense as the 'complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, arts, law, morals, customs and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society', there have been various other definitions and meanings. These include the various ways in which the cultures in the Caribbean have been assessed.

Over the years scholars have analysed Caribbean societies and cultures according to several conceptual models. In the 1960s the plantation society model dominated in the Anglophone Caribbean. According to this model, plantations are characterized by the production of an agricultural monocrop for export, strong monopolistic tendencies and a race-related class system with a weak community structure and a marginal peasantry – these conditions further determined the culture, politics and economy of Caribbean societies. With their legacy of slavery, plantations would continue to influence social life and culture in the Caribbean long after emancipation.

This model has been criticized for its over-determinism of economy on other aspects of society, while it neglects to establish relations between them. Furthermore it fails to take into account that those low in the social hierarchy were also able to influence the system. Hence it neglects perceptions of rights and duties, values, aspirations, ideas and beliefs of various socio-economically disempowered yet important groups (Patterson 1967; Bolland 1997:7). It also overlooks the fact that these groups did not always readily accept cultural dominion over their lives – those with power had to introduce laws and regulations to control the behaviour of the black lower classes in plantation societies both during and after slavery (Bolland 1997:8). Finally this model fails to address the question of how those

without power modelled their life pattern within this structure of inequality. And as it solely focuses on plantations as an economic device, it is also difficult to apply it to Curaçaoan society, which has known a plantation system dissimilar to the rest of the Caribbean.

An alternative model elaborated by the Jamaican anthropologist M.G. Smith (1965) recognizes the role of culture in its analysis. Smith followed the British economist J.S. Furnivall (1948) who used the term 'plural society' to describe the culturally and institutionally complex features of South East Asian societies. Contrary to Furnivall, who utilized this concept from a predominantly economic point of view in relation to the Dutch East Indies, Smith focused on the concept of culture and defined the term 'cultural plurality':

Cultural plurality [...] is a condition in which two or more different cultural traditions characterize the population of a given society [...]. Where cultural plurality obtains, different sections of the total population practice different forms of these common institutions; and [...] differ in their social organization, their institutional activities, and their system of beliefs and values. Where this condition of cultural plurality is found, the societies are plural societies (1965:14).

According to Smith, in these plural societies there is often a lack of consensus of values between ethnic groups, which manifests itself in institutions such as marriage, family, education, economics, religion, language and folklore. Consequently these ethnic groups are continuously in conflict, and are enforced politically through a cultural minority.

The idea that in Caribbean society each social group formed a separate culture without any cohesion with the rest was debunked with the concept of *creolization*. Developed during the 1960s, creolization saw the shared legacy of European plantation societies with enslaved Africans as the foundation of Caribbean culture. The mixture between European and African cultures into a common creole culture resulted in a hybrid synthesis; one that was neither European nor African. For Edward Brathwaite (1974), one of the main proponents of this view on Caribbean culture, creolization as a cultural process took place through two distinctive phases. The first was the process of acculturation, which reinforced the superiority of the European culture with respect to the African and required the dominated to submit by force. The process of interculturalization follows as the subordinated majority shape the dominant culture in ways that are unplanned, unstructured and osmotic. The creolization process that results thus becomes the tentative cultural norm of society.

This creole society model in turn has been subject to scholarly critique. O. Nigel Bolland has been one of the main critics of the creole society model and denounces it as being the action of 'a desperate need for a coherent national ideology and cultural identity by Caribbean nations in the sixties' (1997:8). According to him this model is based on an attempt to bring forward national integration and to create national unity between groups of different ethnic origin in societies profoundly impacted by slavery and colonialism and now by other forces seemingly beyond their control. He further states that by presenting the creole society in this way, one does not pay sufficient attention to change in society nor to the role of structural contradictions and social conflicts happening within this process

of change. The more dialectic approach to the creole society model which he proposes looks at the historical process of domination and subordination within society and at the more mutually dependent relationship between social structure and human agency (1997:8).

Additionally, Michel-Rolph Trouillot argues that such models, including that of Bolland, also neglect historical particulars in the sense that they do not look at the concrete circumstances of individuals engaged in the processes of social change. In Trouillot's view, they pay insufficient attention to the ability of people of African descent to create their cultures 'unexpectedly, unforeseen developments of an agenda set in Europe, by Europe and for Europe' (1998:10). In the same article, he further asserts that this model does not sufficiently consider the ability of the African group in Caribbean societies to 'stretch margins and circumvent borderlines' in spite of and within the context of cultural domination (1998:27-8).

A key issue in these discussions becomes then the question of which role Afro-Caribbeans played in the production and reproduction of culture in Caribbean societies, consisting of groups whose social and political position has been determined by colour and ethnicity. Many theories have affirmed that those in power control the dominant value system through the institutions of State and society. The following questions then arise: How do those in subordinated positions accept or contest these values and ideas of domination? And how do they transform them into something new and different?

The analysis of cultural creativity of those of African descent in Caribbean societies both during and after slavery has been an ongoing debate for many decades. The debate began with E. Franklin Frazier, who argued in an early study (1939) that due to Middle Passage's experiences, upon their arrival in the Caribbean, Africans experienced a cultural vacuum and consequently lost their culture.²⁶ Melville and Frances Herskovits (1934), Melville Herskovits (1941),²⁷ John Blassingame (1972), Lawrence Levine (1977) and Herbert Gutman (1976) have questioned this view, and broke new grounds by showing that even though slaves lived under severe conditions, they were able to survive as a community and recreate their own cultures based on elements that originated from African cultures.

In the search for African cultural elements, other studies have attempted to prove that certain African cultural forms had continued to exist in the Caribbean. Melville and Frances Herskovits (1934, 1941) conducted extensive research in Africa and the Caribbean and identified 'retention' or survivals, as they called some components in Caribbean culture which they linked to African culture. The Herskovits' theory of retention has been questioned by Sidney Mintz and Richard Price (1976), who found this vision of culture too static. According to them the Afro-American culture emanated to a large part in the Caribbean itself (1976:10). It is difficult to find surviving African elements in the Americas since from the start slaves were systematically prevented from bringing with them those materials which maintained their homeland institutions, the complex social structures of their ancestral societies. Mintz and Price further argued that West African knowledge has been perpetuated in the unconscious, underlying 'grammatical principles'. These are the cognitive orientations, attitudes and expectations common to the diverse communities from which most of the enslaved originated and which are shared by all African slaves despite varied African origins (1976:4-5).

Others scholars have taken the discussion a step further and have looked at the variety of ways in which enslaved people affected cultural processes, through resisting the established order. The historian Eugene Genovese distinguished two types of resistance during slavery and consequently argued that slaves in the United States resisted covertly rather than overtly. He claimed that slave revolts occurred where the relationship between master and slave was more business-like and hard, as was the case in very large slave holding units (Genovese 1974:591). Covert resistance tended to occur in opposite situations. Genovese, however, also viewed accommodation as a type of resistance. 'Accommodation itself', as he pointed out, 'breathed a critical spirit and disguised subversive actions and often embraced its apparent opposite, resistance' (1974:591). By being accommodating to slavery, the slaves appeared to agree to the situation, thus avoiding falling victim to the forces of dehumanization, deprivation and self-hatred.

'Resistance' has become an all-encompassing term in studying the everyday manifestation of social life in the Caribbean. The anthropologist Peter J. Wilson, who published one of the earliest works on historical anthropology, applied a bipolar model to the theory of resistance in his study of everyday social life of English-speaking people on the Colombian-owned islands of Providence (1973). In this model, he placed the value of respectability at one end and reputation at the other end. Respectability has to do with the moral force behind the coercive power of colonialism and neo-colonialism and is dominated by the value system of the churches. It is generally supported by the middle class and all classes of women, who seemingly are more influenced by the Church than men. Key values represented here are marriage, the home, self-restraint, work, education, economy, purposeful self-construction and respect for social hierarchical values. Reputation refers to resistance and centres on those behaviour patterns that oppose respectability (Wilson 1973:102, 233). A major criticism of Wilson's bipolar model comes from the feministic studies which go against the view that Caribbean women were compliant to this domination (Besson 2001:93).

Resistance manifests itself in different forms. Several authors cite the everyday life of subjugated people as a form of resistance to those with power. The anthropologist James C. Scott, for example, studied (1990) the ways in which subordinated people respond in their daily activities to the dominant groups and how they continually resist them, both collectively and individually. According to Scott, in contrast to those with power – who display their domination openly and publicly – those subjugated often wear a 'mask', which manifests itself in stupid, innocent or servile behaviour to hide and retain what little power they have. The anthropologist Lawrence Levine has labelled this attitude 'masking'. It is expressed both in speech and in behaviour and involves a whole range of activities (1977:8-9). Scott calls them the 'hidden transcripts', as they entail the offstage speeches, gestures and practices that confirm, contradict or inflect what appears in the public sphere and takes place beyond the direct observation of those with power (1990:4-5). In the case of Curaçao, Armando Lampe (1988) and René Rosalia (1997) have researched aspects of life in the past within this context of resistance, contradicting the idea that Afro-Curaçaoans accepted the existing power relationship passively.

However, an analysis of the everyday life of subjugated people almost solely in the context of either resistance or compliance obscures matters. Do they in their daily lives solely

and continually respond or react to these oppressing forces? Do they manifest dissident cultural behaviour patterns solely to oppose the powerful? Mintz is among those who have argued against characterizing certain actions of people either as resistance or as compliance. Either type of action does not necessarily exclude the other. The most effective forms of resistance, as Mintz points out, were built on prior forms of adaptation to oppressive living conditions (1974:75-81).

De Certeau distinguishes between what he calls strategies of resistance and strategies of opposition. According to him, resistance is only possible when those dominated (as a group or as individuals) act outside the system of domination enclosing them. The opposition strategies, in contrast, are the internal manipulations of the established order that may disrupt, but do not threaten or transform the power system. The concept of tactical opposition often entails people achieving their goals through negotiating, collaborating and compromising with those in power *and* within the system that controls them (de Certeau 1984:35).

Richard Burton extends this idea to the Caribbean (1997). He applies the concept of play, elaborated by Scott (1990), to his analysis of how Afro-Caribbean people oppose power in their daily lives. He argues that it is in the arena of play and not in that of work – where control was very evident – that Afro-Caribbean people manifested their autonomy and opposed the controlling forces. This arena of play manifested itself in cultural areas such as music, dance, food, religion and parties. He suggests, however, that this cultural opposition is double-edged. According to Burton, Afro-Caribbean culture by its very *creoleness* cannot step entirely outside the dominant system in order to resist it, and in that way it involuntarily tends to reproduce its underlying structures (1997:8).

Olwig has observed this in her study of Afro-Nevisian culture (1993). After freedom, she concludes, Caribbean societies became even *more* complex, as people interrelated and interacted on a greater scale than before, while looking for social and economic opportunities inside and outside their own society. Olwig approached the cultural implications of interrelatedness and interactions according to modern concepts such as 'global flows', 'cultural complexity' and 'fluidity'. She based her approach on that of Arjun Appadurai (1990) and Ulf Hannerz (1992), who have looked at present cultures as the results of global processes characterized by the fast streams of information, images and knowledge, and by people who are constantly on the move. Key in this is how people reinterpret and localize these global processes and their impact on society.

Culture has thus been redefined within the context of movement, positioning and interpretation. It no longer seems pervasive, logical and connected, but rather diverse, inconsistent and contentious (Barth 1989:124). Culture is ordered as it operates within 'streams of cultural traditions', which are certain cultural elements able to persist, manifesting themselves with some coherence over time (Barth 1989:130; Olwig 1995c:103). Olwig analyses this Afro-Caribbean culture from the viewpoint of what she labelled three 'cultural traditions'. The first refers to those connected with the development of a colonial society based on a plantation economy with a strong patriarchal characteristic, where those in the lower social hierarchy were allowed some space to express their culture within the oppression situation. The social institutions they developed were determined by the space allowed by the masters to maintain themselves, but also by the 'grammatical

principles' (Mintz and Price 1976:7, 9). For example, slaves were allowed festivities such as Christmas, Easter and harvest. They could celebrate certain events as long as they acted and behaved according to the accepted ideals of those in power.

The second tradition deals with the way in which the Afro-Nevisian group continued to organize itself internally, based on what Mintz and Price have called 'grammatical principles' (1976:7, 9). The enslaved created a cultural sphere of their own, with their own value systems, outside the sphere of control imposed by their master. These involved their notion of kinship, both fictive and bilateral, as well as their way of belonging to different socio-cultural groupings. These communities developed both within and outside the confines of the plantations.

The third tradition came with the influence of the British missionaries and concerned their idea of respectability, stressing values such as 'decency, morality and a proper sexual attitude'. Afro-Nevisians adopt in their own culture elements from the culture deemed respectable by those with power. In their everyday lives, this is applied where it is convenient to their own knowledge, practices, values, initiatives and aspirations (Olwig 1995a:23-39;1995c:113). It is precisely through displaying this paradoxical behaviour that they experience the concept of freedom withheld from them by the dominant class.

What is also important in the thought of Olwig is that she includes next to slavery, the impact of freedom on Afro-Caribbean culture. Most of the old theoretical models and their applications may suggest that only slavery and the circumstances surrounding it have been decisive in the formation of cultures in the Caribbean. In Olwig's vision, however, emancipation added to the complexity and fluidity of Afro-Caribbean cultures.

A Turn towards Culture in the Historiography of Curaçao

The study of Dutch Caribbean culture was pioneered by the historian R.A.J. van Lier and the sociologists Hoetink and René Römer. Van Lier ushered in the discussion on race, class and ethnicity in the Caribbean and introduced the model of plural culture in the region (Sankatsing 2001:60). According to van Lier (1953-1954), Surinamese society was segmented and composed of several cultural groups of different race, ethnicity, language, religion and economic spheres, who coexisted but rarely mingled.

Hoetink continued to use van Lier's concept of a segmented society and applied it to Curaçao (1962:2). This was a segmented society in the sense that it consisted of several groups of different races and associated cultures, each with its own social institutions, structure and social rank, while society as a whole was politically governed by one of these groups. In his earlier analysis of social hierarchy within Curaçaoan slave society, the Dutch and other Europeans were at the apex, themselves divided into Higher and Lower Protestant classes. Next in line were the Sephardic Jews, who arrived in the seventeenth century and who dedicated themselves mostly to commerce. At the bottom were the majority of African descent, who had arrived as slaves (Hoetink 1958). In a later edition of his 1958 dissertation, Hoetink argued that the system of pure plurality is only present at the beginning, when within a society groups of different cultures and racial backgrounds are placed together in a rigid hierarchical order. The cultural interchange

between these groups begins immediately afterwards, through social and sexual contacts (Hoetink 1987:xii).

The Curaçaoan sociologist René Römer was among the first Antillean scholars to write on the issue of culture and cultural identity on Curacao. In agreement with Hoetink, Römer considered the system of segmentation to be present only at the beginning of a process, when groups of different cultures and racial backgrounds are initially placed together in a rigid hierarchical order within an emerging society. This initial process then gives way to the second phase, when social contacts lead to some racial mixing and cultural transfers between ethnicities.²⁸ According to Hoetink and Römer, this fusion between different cultures in society, which Hoetink initially referred to as acculturation, and later creolization, is trilateral in Curaçao. It had emerged from the admixture of white Protestant West European culture, the Latin (or Iberian) culture of Sephardic Jews and African cultures, which over time developed its own authentic character.²⁹ This creolization process manifested itself in cultural areas such as music and dance, eating habits and architecture, but principally through the use of Papiamentu.³⁰

Both Hoetink and Römer do not view cultural contact as has occurred on Curacao as an unilinear process, in which cultural values were transmitted solely from the dominant to the subjugated, leading to change in their behaviour and cultural patterns. However, Afro-Curaçaoans are only awarded a limited role in this process. Römer explains this by stating that the Curaçaoan creole culture vacillates between the 'undesired Africanization of the culture of the white population and the Europeanization of the black population' (1993:20).

Despite their attention to this dynamic interaction, the way in which Hoetink and Römer apply the idea of creolization does not capture sufficiently the tensions and contradictions arising from this fusion of culture in society. Some expressions supported by people of African descent were considered as folk culture, elements of African survivals or echo's from Africa. These expressions were named in that way, without an in-depth study of their impact on society. They are also separated from the creole culture and are marginalized as expressions only existent among the social group without economic power. Römer acknowledged this omission in a later publication, in which he addressed the question as to whether the African elements in Curaçaoan culture are a 'peripheral phenomenon only existent among the black population in society, or whether they are part of the creole culture belonging to all ethnic groups of society' (Römer 1998:82).

The studies of Lampe (1988) and Rosalia (1997), who researched aspects of life in the past using the resistance model, went against the idea that Afro-Curaçaoans accepted the existing power relationship in a passive form, rather than resisting in numerous ways. Both Lampe and Rosalia looked at the arena of play to sustain their thesis empirically. Lampe examined Nanzi stories, while Rosalia looked at it from the perspective of the tambú.

The focus solely on the resistance of subjugated people and their effort to counter-hegemonize those in control oversimplifies the fact that subjugated people live their day-to-day lives in a myriad of ways. They do not solely and continuously respond or react to these oppressive forces. They do not only manifest sanctioned or dissident cultural behaviour patterns to oppose the powerful. In other words, everyday life is much more complex than merely resisting or accommodating those with power. In addition to conflict and

confrontation, the daily social life of subjugated people contains elements of solidarity, cooperation and reciprocity that shape a great deal of the cultural processes. Furthermore, resistance theories, while placing exaggerated focus on conflicts and external dynamics, overlook the internal cultural dynamics that help to shape the form and texture of everyday life as well as many of its social institutions.

In one of the latest attempts to look at the life of Afro-Curaçaoans in the post-emancipation period, Haviser (2001) focuses on the value systems which have governed the attitude of Afro-Curaçaoans both before and after emancipation. He concludes that after 1863 Afro-Curaçaoans changed from being submissive and cooperative to being competitive and alienated. Haviser principally looks at the role the Roman Catholic Church played in education.

The model of cultural complexity applied by Olwig to the small Leeward island of Nevis also holds true for Curaçao. Within this model, culture is complex, multidimensional in scope, fluid and limited by traditions. Conflict, confrontation and contest are constant elements, as are cooperation, reciprocity and negotiation. Olwig, however, studied this model for a society characterized by a plantation economy. On the contrary, Curaçaoan society was unfamiliar with the large-scale plantation economy common to the rest of the Caribbean. Here other factors influenced the complexity of Afro-Curaçaoan society even further.

The first factor was Curaçao's unique position in the Caribbean as a transit and holding place for enslaved Africans to be sold on to mainland Spanish colonies. This had consequences for the cultural traditions and thus added to the complex character of society. The second factor influencing social life was that colonial society was economically founded on commerce and strategic goods rather than on a plantation economy common to the rest of the Caribbean. The enslaved tended to be involved in the production of subsistence products for the plantation owners. This significantly differentiated them from the enslaved on other Caribbean islands, contributing to the formation of a type of social system and culture different from that commonly found in the Caribbean, both during slavery and after. The third element to consider is the position of the Roman Catholic Church, which after the nineteenth century began to play a crucial role in the lives of Afro-Curaçaoans. The Church attempted to bring them in line with a 'civilized' culture.

Conclusion and Central Questions

Recent historical publications on Curaçao have used a socio-historical perspective to study the historically marginalized role of Afro-Curaçaoans. Even though literature in this area is not yet as extensive as it is in the rest of the Caribbean, this new perspective has challenged historians and social scientists to explore new sources and new historical research methods, such as archaeology and oral history.

Most of these studies have addressed the slavery period and/or twentieth-century post-industrial society. As previously stated, the immediate post-emancipation period has not received sufficient attention. The few studies on this subject reveal that after 1863 the social institutions of power persisted and that colour and race remained central to social

mobility. Post-emancipation social life has demonstrated how socially marginalized people continued to be subjugated. In these studies, power and resistance are central concepts. While this is an important advance, most studies on the post-emancipation period have neglected the complexity of the Afro-Curaçaoan experience and the dynamics of social interaction within and beyond the group.

In this thesis my concern is to reveal the cultural complexities of Curaçaoan society and more specifically the role played in this by the Afro-Curaçaoan majority. I will explore the varied forms in which the social and cultural lives of Afro-Curaçaoans developed during the post-slavery era until 1917 by considering the complex ways in which they interacted among themselves and with other groups in society. This complexity is determined by many factors, for example by the diversity of the group itself. In addition their social life is influenced by cultural processes originating from the existing power structures within the group and with the former slave-owners, the State and the Roman Catholic Church.

The central questions in this thesis are: *What role did the State, the former slave-owners and the Roman Catholic Church play in the lives of Afro-Curaçaoans in the post-emancipation era, in what ways did Afro-Curaçaoans shape their own material, social and spiritual lives, either within, outside or in opposition to the constraints of these institutions?*

More specifically, I will try to answer the following questions:

- Taking into account the continuing restrictions (juridical, economical and social) following emancipation, what survival strategies were available to Afro-Curaçaoans and how did these determine the decisions they made in their everyday lives? How did these strategies relate to other large societal issues, such as migration and the management of land resources?
- How has the social order been maintained and contested? Which role did the Church and State play in this and how did the populace respond?
- What was the outlook on life of the former enslaved and how was life symbolized and ritualized in their daily lives?

In order to answer these questions, it will be necessary to tap resources other than the written ones dominant in traditional historiography. I will argue the necessity of this in the next Chapter.

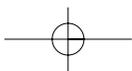
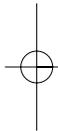
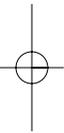
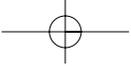
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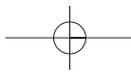
- 1 Lewis (1998) denies this accusation and claims that particularly in the United States anthropology has not shown a lack of historical concern. According to him, even British anthropology has only been a-historical for a very brief period; a trend which was not followed by all its practitioners (see for example Edward Evans-Pritchard 1961). Societies and cultures are being recognized as dynamic entities, therefore the study of their history is essential for a full understanding.
- 2 The terms 'free coloured', 'free people of colour' and 'freedmen' refer to manumitted persons, in most cases of mixed racial ancestry. Gradually they came to be defined as a separate socio-racial group.
- 3 In 1863 the group of Afro-Curaçaoans comprised approximately 85 per cent of the total island population, of which 35 per cent had been freed on 1 July 1863, the date of emancipation in the Dutch colonies (Oostindie 1995b :158; 1997:56).

- 4 Oostindie (1987) attributed this initial amateurism in historical literature to the general lack of attention in the colonizing motherland for the history of these areas.
- 5 See also Klooster 1985.
- 6 The priest-historian M.D. Latour (1950:27) considered Hamelberg, who was also a civil servant, to be the first historian of Curaçao. He granted Hamelberg this status due to the fact that in his writings he had made use of official documents and governmental archives. At Hamelberg's death the local newspaper *La Cruz* (15-1-1919) wrote that Curaçao had lost a great friend. He was also praised for his efforts to bring economic projects to Curaçao and St. Eustatius.
- 7 In 1896 the civil servant Hamelberg proposed the establishment of a Society for the study of history. The then governor C. Barge recommended an expansion of this Society, enabling it to also focus on language, geographical origin and what was then called 'volkenkunde'. In the Netherlands the term 'volkenkunde' was utilized until the twentieth century as a synonym for 'ethnology' and 'ethnography'. The Society's official name was: 'Genootschap voor Geschied-, Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde'.
- 8 As a result of this approach Curaçao, as the centre of Dutch colonization in the Caribbean, received far more attention than the other five islands of the Netherlands Antilles, which at the time were called 'Curaçao en Onderhorigheden' (the present name was not officially introduced until 1948). It was more or less taken for granted that by writing the history of Curaçao, the history of Aruba, Bonaire, St. Martin, Saba and St. Eustatius would also be covered. Goslinga (1971) represents this traditional focus on politics in historiography. Goslinga was an (art) historian and a novelist, who would later become a professor at the University of California and at the University of Florida (Gainesville). As the title of this book indicates, the author looked at the imperial history of the Dutch in the Caribbean and in Africa and at their quest for land in these areas. Hamelberg was early in his advocacy for writing the history of the Dutch Leeward Islands and that of the Windward Islands as separate units. Initially, however, his proposals to the colonial government fell on deaf ears. When, for example, he wanted to write a history of St. Eustatius and therefore deemed it necessary to visit St. Martin and Saba as well, his request to the government in 1892 for financial support was denied (NA, Ministerie van Koloniën, 12-9-1892/551, inv. no. 6789). In 1903 Hamelberg produced a compilation of original documents on the two island units (Hamelberg 1901-1903b), thus making public some government records available on these islands.
- 9 Both Hoyer and van Meeteren were addressed as 'Shon', indicating their high social position (Shon Wein Hoyer and Shon Popie).
- 10 See Hoyer 1933, 1937, 1941. See De Gaay Fortman (1934) for a review of *Algun pagina tuma foi historia di Curaçao* by Hoyer.
- 11 Van Meeteren wrote several books on Curaçaoan history (for example 1950 and 1951). Soon after he died, van Meeteren was recognized as one of the three most important historians of his time, together with W.R. Menkman and B. de Gaay Fortman. See the article by M.D. Latour in *Amigoe*, 11-5-1953. See also the article by B. de Gaay Fortman in *Beurs en Nieuwsberichten*, 13-4-1953.
- 12 See several publications by Brada. For an overview of Euwens' work, see Nagelkerke 1973 and 1982. The priest Latour ventured to write on secular matters. He wrote a number of articles on themes such as the Papiamentu language and the belief-system on Curaçao, which he called Voodoo, after the Afro-Caribbean religion of Haiti.
- 13 Already in 1891 a person named W. Henriquez requested a monument to be erected to the memory of Niewindt. See *La Union*, 27-5-1891.
- 14 *Amigoe di Curaçao*, 4-10-1924.
- 15 See also Blussé, van der Putten and Vogel (1996:311). In this interview Hoetink claims to have been inspired by the Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre, who used social science methods (1946). Van Lier's sociological-historical book on Suriname (1949) had also been a source of inspiration in reaching a non-traditional historiography for the island, which he refers to in the following comment: 'Although some history books had been written, no effort had been made

to analyse, be it in a modest way, Curaçao's society in the way that van Lier had done for Suriname.'

- 16 In 1967 a shorter English version of this work was published.
- 17 See also van Soest 1980 and 1983.
- 18 See also Beckles and Shepherd 1991:209-21.
- 19 See also Renkema 1975. Rupert (1999) focuses on five hundred years of commercial history on the island. Jews were predominant in this history. However, Rupert also examines the contributions of some members of the popular class to the commercial activities on the island in the form of small-scale trading.
- 20 Brereton 1988. See also Shepherd, Brereton and Bailey 1995.
- 21 See also Philipps 1988; Henriquez 1991; Cuales 1980.
- 22 On 1 July 1863 slaves received their freedom in the Netherlands Antilles. On 26 July 1499 the Spaniards had arrived on the islands. Initially the commemoration of the 17 August 1795 slave revolt was an activity of individuals who were challenging the existing order. For several years, these groups – through movements and foundations – made it their principal goal to create an awareness of the slave revolt and its leaders. Examples are the 'Movimentu 17-8-1795' established in 1968, and the 'Fundashon Identidat Antiano' (the Foundation for Antillean identity) led by A.F. Paula. The aim of the first group was to improve the self-esteem of the black Curaçaoan. A step in the right direction was to commemorate the slave revolt. In this, they differed from the second group, which strived for the recognition of the first of July as a national day.
- 23 See also Do Rego 1995. Do Rego's use of Papiamentu to explain the causes and developments of this slave revolt was seen as an attempt to make history accessible to the general Antillean public.
- 24 See also Haviser 1991 and 1999. Some years previously, Haviser used a similar method for uncovering the indigenous Amerindian culture on the island. His work gave another dimension to local historiography since history had focused almost exclusively on European contact.
- 25 During slavery the *tambú* was feared by slave-owners, as it offered the enslaved the opportunity to gather and express their disgust about their situation by means of song and dance. It was also condemned by the Catholic clergy, who called the dance lascivious and sexually immoral. Members of the older generation still relate the severe forms of punishment of those found participating in a *tambú* celebration. Punishment by the clergy included the confiscation of drums, whipping, and even expulsion from the Catholic Church.
- 26 Frazier based his ideas on the situation in the United States and stated that due to slavery blacks had become uprooted people. The phenomenon of matrilocality among the descendants of the enslaved was taken as an example of one of the results of this cultural uprootedness.
- 27 In 1934 Melville and Frances Herskovits published a study on religious survivals among the Saramaca.
- 28 Römer also used the term 'segmented society' (1964, 1969).
- 29 Römer (1964:20). See also Römer 1969 and 1993.
- 30 Römer maintained that Curaçao's distinctive culture manifested itself predominantly in the Papiamentu language (see Römer 1974 and 1993). The status of this creole language differs from local languages on other Caribbean islands since it is recognized and used as a means of communication by all social classes (Römer 1993).





CHAPTER II

A Methodology of Afro-Curaçaoan History: Archival and Oral Sources

Introduction

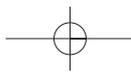
The British historian Edward Thompson emphasizes in his seminal work on the origins of the English working class (1977) that historiography should aim at remembering ‘the poor stocker, the Luddite cropper, the “obsolete” hand-loom weaver, the “utopian” artisan and even the deluded follower of Joanna Southcott’ (1977:13). Historiography, he later wrote, must not only examine what has happened, but should also analyse the different ways in which the masses have acted and thought in certain situations. Essentially, it should look at how they conducted their everyday lives and how they strove to make something of their situation (1991:5).

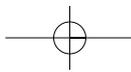
Increasingly this approach has found acceptance among historians. There has been a change in the approach of studying the past, by examining large groups of people previously neglected in historiography. Historians are now aware that they cannot interpret history as a sequence of events in which only men with power played important roles. There is a growing recognition of human activity at every level, not simply a myopic focus on politics. This manifests itself in the study of societies from a micro-perspective, focusing on, for example, small communities, individuals, and life within the family or other domestic groups. This new approach also concerns itself with meanings and perceptions of people throughout history and therefore looks at how ordinary people viewed their life and gave meaning to it (Frykman 1996:25).¹

Determining meanings for those neglected by history has proven no easy task. How do we research the lives of the masses? More precisely, how do we proceed to gather data on these groups rarely documented by the authorities? What types of data are then available? Where can we find them and what are their strengths and weaknesses?

In the Caribbean, scholars such as Melville J. Herskovits (1941), and later Sidney Mintz and Richard Price (1976), as well as Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995), have been strong advocates of this broader approach to history. Publications on this subject have been numerous. At a time when little attention was paid to the lives of the black population in the Americas, Herskovits constantly argued against the idea that blacks had no history. To prove this, he collected both in Africa and in the Americas as many detailed data regarding their cultural history as possible.

Mintz and Price, even though opposed to Herskovits’ theory of African retention and survival in the Americas – preferring instead the term ‘transformations’ – also applied ethnographical methodologies and anthropological theories to their studies of the populations





in the Caribbean of African descent. Price (1983), for instance, is an attempt to study the history of the Surinamese Saramacan Maroons based on their own forms of transmitting history. He paired their recollection of history with the written accounts laid down by the Dutch colonial power.

On Curaçao one can consider the aforementioned study by Rosalia on the tambú (1997) as an important step towards this new approach. Rosalia based his work to a large extent on oral testimonies and songs which he had collected over many years while living among the black popular class. These oral testimonies were presented alongside written documents. This musical expression, seen as immoral by the authorities and thus suppressed, was re-examined as a valid experience of Afro-Curaçaoans. Thus, the author has given a new dimension to historiography.

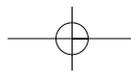
Since the use of oral sources is central to my study I would like to move away from the debate about their value and importance for historical writing. In this Chapter I will focus on how I use oral sources as material for historical reading, specifically for the purpose of examining the cultural complexity of post-emancipation Afro-Curaçaoan social life. Firstly, I will describe how I plan to use narrative analysis to understand the oral testimonies I have collected. Secondly, I will discuss how I have tried to overcome the problems of veracity and representativeness which challenge their use.

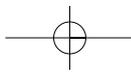
Oral Sources as a Basis for Study

In order to analyse the values and ideas of those whom history has rendered silent, one should search for what James Scott has called the 'hidden transcripts'. Scott explains that these consist of those offstage speeches, gestures and practices that confirm, contradict or inflect what appears in the public transcript (1990:4-5). They encompass the various ways in which people behave and think when they are out of reach of those in authority. They include the 'offstage' behaviour and intentions adopted to help them gain some kind of power. Sometimes these hidden transcripts are even conspiratorial in nature as they are also a way in which the subjugated group openly expresses its discontent with the behaviour of the dominant class.

Oral sources are central to discovering these hidden transcripts (Smith 2001:7-11). Besides providing information on important historical events that have guided the lives of people and on how these people understand and explain their past, they also give an insight into the ideas and values behind their actions – both when the dominant institutions allow them space to express their culture and when they are in the privacy of their own group. In that way, they present the symbolic frameworks within which ordinary people defined their lives and the value they attributed to these symbols. According to Alessandro Portelli, 'they provide a window' for the understanding and interpretation of the lives of people, who previously were not considered an important element in the historiography (1994:351).

A large part of the oral sources in this study is based on my research carried out during the period between 1980 and 1995, when I was working at the Institute of Archeology and Anthropology of the Netherlands Antilles (AAINA). The oral research project by the





AAINA is a government supported attempt to document as much information as possible about the life and customs on Curaçao in the past by interviewing people over sixty years of age. The respondents had been born between 1883 and 1926 and came from all parts of the island. They ranged from those with no formal education to those who studied as far as secondary school. Generally women were less educated than men, with some receiving no schooling at all and others attending convent schools where they had learned how to sew and make straw hats.

In my research I have sought to make a distinction between oral history and oral tradition. Both consist of oral material, in the sense that they are transmitted orally and, in this case, conducted in the context of fieldwork. Oral history entails testimonies and personal recollections of people who have experienced certain events first-hand or who were sufficiently close to the events to recollect them. Oral tradition embodies stories, myths, songs, proverbs and other information passed down by word of mouth from generation to generation.

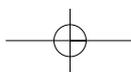
In theory this distinction can be made. However, in a field situation the line is harder to draw and is continually being crossed by 'the bearers of testimonies' (Dorson 1979:9). According to Richard Dorson one should not overlook the fact that, firstly, over time oral history will incorporate folk elements, and secondly, that folklore material such as stories, proverbs, myths and songs can also shed light on the historical past (1979:45).

During the project the interviewees were informed about the objectives of the research. Following this they were questioned on what they could remember of their parents' and grandparents' lives, in particular relating to work, social and spiritual life. In this way their lives were given some family context. They were also asked whether their ancestors had passed down any information regarding slavery and, if so, what the nature of this information was. The interviewees were then asked further questions on their own life and, depending on what they remembered, were asked to give more detail on specific issues, events or customs. I taped most of the interviews with the permission of the informants. In doing so, they have become primary sources verifiable by others. After the demise of the AAINA these recordings are now stored in the National Archives in Willemstad.

On Methodological and Practical Aspects

The oral source is distinct from other branches of primary historical material due to its reliance on memory rather than on texts. The fact that these testimonies are not contemporary with the related events and issues, and that their recordings are mostly carried out long after the events, has resulted in them being judged a-scientific, selective and fragmented, as well as subjected to biases and quirks. These observations compound the perception that texts are the only reliable historical sources. In this sense the reliability of verbalizations is judged according to the same criteria as written texts, resulting in little attempt being made to reveal particularities retained within memory (Ong 2002:10-1).

The awareness that oral sources are generally perceived in this way placed before me certain challenges when collecting and processing the information. It was thus important to find out how Afro-Curaçaoans have continued to remember events and issues often



occurring in their early lives or in those of their ancestors, and how they have been able to transmit this information to younger generations. Furthermore, as my study also deals with everyday life experiences following emancipation, the question is how do we retrieve information on a subject such as daily routines – the majority of which are unmemorable and thus easily forgotten? The issue of memory was paramount in my study.

Finally, not all people were willing to transmit information to a person outside their friends and family. Oral history differs from the more traditional forms of story-telling both in its narrative range and in the type and degree of audience involvement. There is a face to face exchange between interviewee and interviewer, mediated by the strategic placement of a microphone. The interviewer is not part of the interviewee's social circle. The interviewee creates the situation but this is shaped by the interviewer asking questions which are more directive than the audience reaction during story-telling (Portelli 1994:164).

Considering this method's directive approach, how do we get people to transmit information which perhaps they would rather erase from their memory as they consider it of little value for their self-identity? The question is then not what do people remember, but what do they want to remember, and how, if at all, do they transmit information considered unworthy of remembering? For example, when people were unwilling to talk, they would say things such as: 'I do not remember anything' or: 'why are you interested in this stupidity?' Particularly regarding themes such as slavery, and the relationship between themselves or their forefathers and plantation owners, was there often hesitation before they were willing to talk. Some stated bluntly that it was never discussed within the family or that they would rather not discuss it. Some would even express anger at the fact that I was trying to retrieve information they were trying hard to forget.

Paul Brenneker and Elis Juliana, who were the first to conduct serious ethnographic research on the island, also signalled this phenomenon. In an interview I had with Brenneker in 1991 in anticipation of the fact that he and Juliana would be honoured during the folklore festival held in Curaçao that year, he related the following:

In those days, it was very difficult to interview people. People did not like to be questioned, and were reluctant to give information. They carried a lot of hatred in them. About the mistreatment of the enslaved they did not know all the details, but they were still very angry. They would get angry again when one would say that their ancestors had been slaves.

Thus one of the challenges during my research was to overcome the older generation's unwillingness to talk about certain areas of their past they would rather not be reminded of or, as was often the case, would like to erase completely from memory. The approach of Brenneker and Juliana to this phenomenon proved very effective: both claimed that it was worthwhile to initially build up a sense of trust with the interviewees.

For me this involved visiting the informants on more than one occasion and paying attention to their emotional and social needs; generally helping out wherever possible. It also meant participating in important events in their lives, such as the birth of a grandchild, the death of family members, first communion and marriage ceremonies etc. This is

in fact the ethnographic research method to uncover the past. As a relationship of trust was built, the respondents were more inclined to relate all types of information. Furthermore, I observed that certain sensitive, but valuable, information would be given more easily when no tape recorder was present. People would then be more open about painful episodes experienced by their family or by themselves.

During the interviews it was essential to get people to recall as many memories as possible. When a person seemed to forget certain valuable pieces of information, I developed devices to help trigger the memory, thus facilitating the continuation of the story. One such way was to allow a member of the younger generation, who was close to the older person and had shown an interest in the subject, to be present during the interview. Their presence would help trigger the memory of the interviewee. They would say for example: 'Father or mother, do you remember you did so and so when you worked the land, or when you were doing so and so..., you would sing this particular song?' They would start singing the song and the parent would then continue. In that way the younger generation performed the role of enhancer of memory.

In other cases I interviewed the informants while at work washing clothes, preparing food, working on the land, burning charcoal, cuddling their grandchildren or singing songs. This also helped them to recall certain events, as they associated what they were doing at that moment with past activities. This association was present in the way they talked about life. In most conversations people would not tell their stories in a linear way, but cyclically, going back and forth in time, comparing past with present.

The reminiscences of the informants went back to things their grandparents had told them. Often the presence of a member of the older generation was very important in their lives. In the realm of the extended family, grandparents or other family members were important transmitters of historical knowledge. Even when informants had not been born during slavery, they were told of slavery by these relatives, who had had first-hand experience.²

What other devices and methods have Afro-Curaçaoans developed in order to remember their past? Walter Ong (2002) claims that people have developed so-called mnemonic devices to organize and structure their thoughts in an attempt to ensure that information considered essential for the existence of the self and of the community is remembered and transmitted. The author gives some psychodynamics of orality which are applied in oral culture to retain information for later recall. According to Ong, people think in memorable thoughts, which are mnemonic patterns, shaped for ready oral recurrence. He gives as examples heavily rhythmic, balanced patterns, repetitions or antitheses, alliterations and assonances, epithetic and formulaic sayings and proverbs (2002:34).

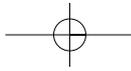
The following part of an interview demonstrates a mnemonic pattern of repetition:

R.A.: *Señora, su wela tabata traha pa shon?*

R.A.: *Madam, did your grandmother work for the shon?*

I.S.: *Laga nos bisa, su kasá tabata fitó. Awor ora nan yu a nase, nan no a bai biba niun otro kaminda. Banda pariba di kas di shon,*

I.S.: *Let us say, her husband was an overseer. When their children were born, they did not go and live elsewhere. At the eastern side of*



nan a traha un kas den kurá di Didi, Didi di Beri. Nos a lanta haña Didi di Beri ta mira bestia. Esei ta bestia e ta mira.

R.A.: *Tabatin mas hende ku ta traha ei?*

I.S.: *Sí, hopi tabatin. Ku mi ta kòrda, tabatin Didi, tabatin nos tawela, vitó, anto tabatin Dochi, ku ta kasá ku mi tanta. Dochi tabata wak kunuku, wak bestia. Manera shon Manchi t'ei, ta shon Manchi su kunuku. Tabatin tur kos den dje, fuera di bestia, pal'i fruta... Tabatin un palu di mango dushi, esei niun kriá no por kom'é. No tin mag. Bo por kom'é sí, pero hòrtá (hari). Shon no ke. Bo no por kom'é, anto di shon e ta. E ta un mango grandi, dushi, anto nan a dun'e e nòmber di 'webu di toro'. Anto esei mester bai kue apart pa shon. T'asina ta bida. Ora bo ta bou di palu, bo tin ku wanta lokual para hasi.³*

the house of the shon, they built a house in the yard of Didi, Didi, the son of Beri. We grew up and found Didi, the son of Beri, looking after the animals.

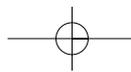
R.A.: *Were there more people working?*

I.S.: *Yes, many. As I can recall, there was Didi, there was our grandfather, vitó, and there was Dochi, who was my aunt's husband. Dochi used to take care of the kunuku, looked after the animals. You see shon Manchi, it is his place. It had everything, besides animals, fruit trees... It also had a mango tree with delicious mangos. No servant was allowed to eat the mangos from that tree. You were not allowed. You could eat it, if you stole it (laughter). The shon did not allow it. You cannot eat it, as it belongs to the shon. It was a big, sweet mango. They called it 'bull's balls'. You had to pick that one apart for the shon. That is life. When you are under a tree, you have to endure what the birds do.*

With the proverb 'When you are under a tree, you have to endure what the birds do' the informant summarized her thoughts and remembered the situation as it was. It thus helped her putting the story in the right perspective. One technique utilized among Afro-Curaçaoans was repetition. By repeating certain types of information, which had been transmitted by the older generation, the younger ones reproduced what they had been told.

This specific method for preserving and transmitting knowledge was also recognized by Eduardo Tokaai, born in 1899. He remembered that when he was small, at home in the evenings he and his brothers and sisters would gather in a circle around their father, who would tell them stories. During the story-telling their father would stop and ask them what he had talked about. Those who had forgotten were sanctioned verbally and mocked, while those who remembered were praised. Here emphasis is put on the ability of a person to reproduce a story as verbatim as possible.⁴

Similarly, Brenneker also pointed out that story-tellers always repeated the last words of a sentence in their story before beginning a new one. According to him this was done in order to allow the listeners to follow the story (1986:129). For the story-teller it was also a way of structuring the theme and to make sure that the story followed the rules of narration. The same was apparent in the presentation of songs. There, the performer started by repeating the first line several times. This way of introduction was called figurative, the opening lines were referred to as 'the door of the song' (*porta di kantu*) (1986:131).



The role of specialists in preserving memories has also been essential. In most oral cultures we encounter professional poets and raconteurs who wander from place to place performing. Others have some particular position or recognized poetic skill (Horton and Finnegan 1973:120). On Curaçao, certain gifted people made story-telling their profession (Jesurun 1899; Rutgers 1994:30). Good singers were known by the name 'Bas', corrupted from the Dutch word *baas*, meaning boss. In the twentieth century people such as Cola Susanna, Martili Pieters (Martilio Jacob Thomas), Imelda Valerianus and at the moment Victor Batolomeo have played this role. In my research I make a distinction between these specialists and the general public. As they are considered to be very knowledgeable, specialists are often called upon to talk of the past. This sometimes leads to the repetition of information.

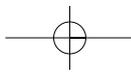
During the interviews the observation of body language – all actions, gestures and noises – was important. Did the informants hesitate when telling a certain passage of their story? Did they pause? Did they try to evade a question and talk about other matters instead? What did they repeatedly say? Did they show anger, humour or any other emotion? Did they make any gestures? Did they make noises, such as chuckling, sucking their teeth etc? For example, after the above interviewee mentioned that the mango's could only be eaten if stolen (*kom'é si, pero hòrtá*), she laughed. And on recalling the name (*the balls of a bull*) given to a mango, she also laughed. In the transcriptions this information associated with body language was written down as additional notes. The transcriptions were carried out verbatim.

The use of humour in interviews to accentuate certain painful events or issues has sometimes confused me, as one would rather expect anger to be expressed. In her study of life under the Fascist regime in Italy, Luisa Passerini observes that people often recall tragic events in their life in a humorous way. She believes that oral testimonies draw a veil over tragic elements in people's lives and bring out the symbolic overturning of order, similar to carnival (1987:21).

Difficulties arise due to some traditional Curaçaoan songs being expressed in a now extinct language, Guene. This language was developed as a means of communication among the enslaved and persisted until the twentieth century. At present a few people might still claim to sing in Guene, but are unable to translate the words into the creole language Papiamentu. Nevertheless, they can explain what the songs are about.

Scholars assume that most of the words relating to what people still call Guene are a bastardization of the old language. One of them is Frank Martinus (1997), who deciphers part of the language in order to analyse its contribution to Papiamentu. According to Wim Rutgers (2001) the slaves sang in Guene to mislead their master. It was used as a secret language to talk about their master. Later plantation owners became aware of this phenomenon. This I deduced from an interview with someone knowledgeable about the language. He stated that on some plantations the inhabitants were prohibited from singing in Guene, as the owners suspected that they were singing about them. Guene was thus based on secrecy; it permitted people to express their feelings in a concealed way. As late as the twentieth century, songs in Guene served as vehicles for protest.⁵

The literal transcriptions of oral data not only provide historical information regarding events and certain aspects of life, but also help to uncover how this information was memorized and transmitted. Informants would distinguish between what they had heard



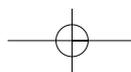
and what they had experienced themselves. For example, they would distance themselves from the information by saying: 'segun mi a tende' (as I have heard it), or 'nan di' (so they have said), or 'mi a lanta tende' (while I was growing up I heard). But when they wanted to make precise comments, they would say: 'segun mi mes a mira' (as I have seen it myself), 'mi a mirele ku mi mes wowo' (I have seen it with my own eyes) or by stressing 'mi a mirele ku e wowonan ku bichi lo kome un dia' (I have seen it with these eyes which worms will eat one day). Christine Hardung refers to these remarks as 'indexical markers'. These signs are spontaneously interwoven within speech and allude to meanings in the narration. They are tied directly to the presence of remembered experiences and are integrated into the perspective of the speaker – thus demonstrating that the subject being described does not concern a second-hand experience (Hardung 2002:41).

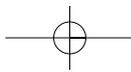
Information would also be concealed through taking codes from their usual context and transplanting them into another. For example, sometimes animal figures are used to emphasize a point. In songs and stories particularly animal figures are recurring features and serve to camouflage feelings not easily expressed openly. Thus the problem lies in decoding these messages from their metaphorical meaning into a literal one, in order to discover the symbols and meanings conveyed in them.

Scholars such as Vansina have emphasized the use of myths in history and have stated that in every community people have a representation of the origin of the world, of the creation of mankind, and of their particular position as a community and as human beings within this (Vansina 1985:21-3).

It is also here that the use of written documents has proven essential. Sometimes one interpretation is insufficient as data may have *double entendre* and varied readings. The information may contain symbols with specific meanings relevant at the time and place of their creation. Through the use of documents it is possible to place these symbols within a historical timeframe. This was also understood by earlier folklorists, although, regrettably, they provided little background information on the world outside the folkloric material they collected. Nevertheless, this information helps to discover formulas and devices used for remembering and deciphering certain historical metaphors. The study of this folkloric material in print enables stories, proverbs and songs expressed at a certain time for a particular purpose to be revealed. These data give access to a culture existing at the time of their documentation.

The cross-checking of my material with that of Brenneker and Juliana was carried out to this end. Brenneker was born in 1912 in Venlo, the Netherlands. He was ordained a priest in 1932 and came to Curaçao in 1939. From 1940 until 1946 Brenneker was a priest in Kralendijk, Bonaire, where he collected and recorded some aspects of the island folklore (1947).⁶ In the nineteen fifties he returned to Curaçao to continue documenting these data until his death in 1996. Juliana, a Curaçaoan, also developed an interest in the folklore of the island. Originally a poet and a cultural performer, he began to collect oral material during the nineteen sixties; he would later collaborate with Brenneker. Sometimes their oral material was very useful in complementing the information I had gathered during my research.





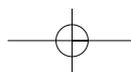
Cross-checking Oral Data with Written Documents

Paul Thompson has discussed the reliability of oral evidence (1978, 1988, 2000) and has claimed that in order to evaluate the veracity of oral testimonies about the past it is important to cross-check them with other documentation. This underlines what the anthropologist James Fentress and the historian Chris Wickham have stated, namely that oral tradition has revealed itself to be a valuable historical source when sifted, correlated and cross-checked with any other evidence until a residuum is obtained which is acceptable as truth (Fentress and Wickham 1992:76).⁷ One such source is the written documentation through which oral material can be falsified and interpreted.

Trouillot, however, has elaborated on the limitations of written documents and has shown how historiography has neglected the ordinary people at four moments: the moment of fact creation (the making of sources); the moment of assembling the facts (the making of archives); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of narratives); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of history in the final instance) (1995:26). The first moment's neglect leads to an additional dilemma when studying written documentation of the post-emancipation Caribbean: after emancipation the category of 'slave-master' as an organizing principle no longer exists in these documents and Afro-Curaçaoans could be referred to as 'blacks', 'working class', 'folk class', 'former enslaved' etc. There is thus no coherence in the labeling of people. This also hinders, of course, the ordering of records (Scott 1988:408).

In the case of Curaçao, the written documents are official sources, stored at the national archives on the island as well as in the Netherlands. For this study I began by consulting the published colonial reports (*Koloniale verslagen*) from 1863 until 1917. Each year the Dutch colonial government composed these reports, giving an overview of how certain matters had evolved during the preceding year in the colonies. Next I consulted the correspondence between the district masters of several island districts. Following emancipation, the colonial government divided the island into five districts and placed a master at the head of each one. Their tasks were extensive: they had to look at whether the manumitted former slaves continued working for the plantation owners; they were assistant officers to the police and justice (and as such had to maintain law and order); they had to see to it that the regulations regarding agriculture and animal husbandry were observed; they also supervised the public roads and lands and kept an eye on the private properties; and they acted as intermediaries between the government, land owners and the ordinary people. They belonged to the upper class and to the group with power in society.

Although there were some exceptions to the rule, generally they took the side of those with power. When using these written documents, then, one should take into consideration that those spoken for in these sources represented a different social group within the existing power system (Scott 1990:2-3). The group with power is inextricably linked with the creators of historical records: the same people that shape the relationship between those with power and those without, also shape what people know about this relationship. In that way the written material from this group is a representation of those with power in society. Hence, one should evaluate these official historical sources in the light of power relationships.



Scott indicated the interaction process between the powerful and the powerless, and its manifestation in the written documents, with the term 'public transcripts'. According to him, they do not portray the entire story of the relationships between different groups of unequal power. The greater the differences between these groups, the more the relationship will be stereotyped when documented (Scott 1990:2-3). Nevertheless, as the black popular class could address its complaints to the district masters, these correspondences give a glimpse of their way of life. The historian David Hall compares the use of this type of material with the 'peeling of an onion until we reach a layer that is of the people' (1984:10).

I complemented the correspondence between the district masters with other written documentation in order to provide a broader context within which to assess changes in the lives of Afro-Curaçaoans. They mostly contain information on policies and policy implementation, and are part of the colonial archives kept at the National Archives in The Hague. In this respect, legal documents, such as the *Rol van Strafzaken* (List of Criminal Cases, 1873-1917) stored at the National Archives in Willemstad, proved an interesting source, helping to shed light on Afro-Curaçaoan history.⁸

My intention with regard to these records was twofold: not only to give insight into conflicts and problems existing within the popular class, but also to reconstruct ordinary, everyday assumptions. Even though the events in these cases are often extraordinary, the records hold information on what people of the popular class considered important enough to sue another person for. Also the making of laws indicates that certain regulations needed to be introduced to regulate people's behaviour. Laws give an excellent insight into the attitudes of the people to whom they applied.

The Roman Catholic Church is another source of valuable information. Its documents are stored in the National Archives in Willemstad and in its own archives – both on the island and in the Netherlands. These documents reveal the preoccupations of the elite class with the life style of the populace. One cannot study life in the early post-emancipation period without considering the influence of the Church. Letters, reports and articles by priests recording their contacts with individuals of the popular class – some also talked with the elderly in order to gain specific information regarding people or past events⁹ – provide an interesting view on the ways in which the clergy exercised control over their lives. In various documents priests have expressed their opinions on certain popular customs, thus showing an interest in them. Apart from constituting a source of information on the Church's civilizing mission, these documents reveal the response of the popular class to this authority.

Cross-checking with Folkloric Data in Print

In order to contextualize my interviews I have tried to connect my own findings with other recorded oral testimonies. These mainly entail the stories, folk tales, songs, proverbs and surveys of customs published in magazines and books over the years. As stated, the principal dilemma in dealing with oral sources is the lack of a timeframe. Here I will attempt to address this problem by cross-checking them with contributions from the field of folklore. Anthropology and folklore are closely related in the study of the lives of

Afro-Curaçaoans, as is the case throughout the Americas (Szwed and Whitten 1970:23). The folklore data in print enabled me to place my own research within a timeframe and to observe how oral information has developed over time.

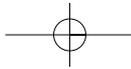
Historically, on Curaçao oral information tended to be published under the term 'folklore'.¹⁰ In general these data were studied by literary scholars who looked at style, character and symbolism in the same way as they did when studying literature. I will examine these data from a historical perspective. In order to utilize folkloric sources for the purpose of writing history, it is necessary to determine their strengths and weaknesses. There are methodological problems involved. Lawrence Levine, for example, cites difficulties in dating and determining the place of origin of this type of material. In the main, the identity of the creator is unknown and the geographical distribution remains unclear (1983:338).

Yet even though these data are not derived from perfect sources, they do shed light on certain aspects of people's lives. They are thus very helpful in gaining some sense of the vision, values and aspirations of a group in the past, and help to understand the inner dynamics, strategies and mechanisms employed to guard the members' values and maintain a sense of worth (Levine 1983:338; Maza 1996:1495).¹¹ Folkloric data give a new dimension to history, beyond the descriptive chronicles.

On Curaçao, the documentation of folklore started rather late and mainly in response to interest from Europe and the United States. Folklore was recorded without any scientific pretension and most folklorists followed in almost identical fashion the leading practices of Europe and North America. Areas receiving most attention were stories, songs and proverbs. However, the local approach to folklore differed from the European approach in its definition of 'folk'. In Europe the term related to peasants who under the impact of industrialization became submerged and whom the educated gentry discovered as a group with its own local stories, customs and beliefs. On Curaçao, as in the United States, folklore was not linked with the peasantry, but with ethnicity and race. Here, folkloric studies dealt with the way of life of the black descendants of the enslaved.

One of the earliest versions of Curaçaoan folk tales in print was published by the Society for the Study of History and Ethnology in 1899. In its third report the Society published four Nanzi stories from Curaçao. Considering the corpus of thirty Nanzi stories later gathered by Nilda Geerdink-Jesurun Pinto (1952) it is likely that the collector of the 1899 publication made a selection. However, it is impossible to determine how and on what grounds. The question as to whether these four stories were considered representative for the Afro-Curaçaoan folk tradition remains unanswered.

When using these sources for a historical purpose, scholars should also look at how they were gathered. They should know as much as possible about the conditions under which this process took place and about the attitudes of the collectors towards the material (Dorson 1983:334). Regarding the aforementioned four Nanzi stories, the anonymous author does give the sources of his information. He stated that he had recorded them directly from the mouths of elderly people, who claimed to have heard them when they were young. Hence, we can deduce that these stories were passed on orally and that they go back in history. Indirectly this also shows that Nanzi stories were present on Curaçao during the period of slavery, although there are no written data recording their existence in that period.



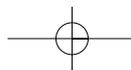
The collector does not mention whether his stories are verbatim reproductions of his raconteurs or whether he left out certain passages. Most scholars of folklore studies are confronted with this issue of censorship: material may have been altered by leaving out certain parts of stories and songs deemed unfit by the collectors. In addition, the possibility of self-censorship – applied by the narrators or raconteurs themselves – needs to be taken into account (Fentress and Wickham 1992:46).¹² One can make similar observations regarding the stories of the same genre published in the Papiamentu newspaper *La Cruz* as of 1900. Contrary to the four Nanzi stories printed in 1899, the newspaper placed these stories without comment.¹³

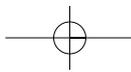
In 1926 H. van Cappelle published the Dutch versions of the same Curaçaoan Nanzi stories which had appeared in 1899. He did this together with stories from Suriname, Jamaica and St. Eustatius, in doing so creating the first comparative collection in the field. It is worth noting that in his introduction, van Cappelle acknowledges the historical value of these stories. According to him, myths and legends preserve old memories and are faithful reproductions of the thoughts people had regarding their lives. Van Cappelle also indicated how he had collected the Surinamese stories, so that the methodological aspect of his research can be evaluated (1926:197, 353).¹⁴ He claimed that he had attempted to collect stories on Curaçao in the same way as he had done in Suriname, but had been unsuccessful.

Both the author in the aforementioned report of 1899 and van Cappelle refer to the increasing interest in this type of information during that period.¹⁵ Roman Catholic priests contributed to this interest as they collected the stories or made them available in print. Examples are the stories appearing in *La Cruz*. Between 1937 and 1940 the priest M.D. Latour published several Nanzi stories in the *West-Indische Gids* in response to the academic demand for this type of material in the Netherlands.¹⁶

Thus, when using these data for scientific study we must consider the motives for their collection, since this influenced the method.¹⁷ Interest in these materials does not necessarily imply respect. The anthropologist Virginia Domínguez states (2000) that we should look at the underlying goals of studies of this kind. Research in this field was mostly undertaken to support the Darwinian, hierarchical relationship between cultures. On Curaçao, scholars interested in this type of information often displayed a somewhat ambivalent attitude. Admittedly, four Nanzi stories were collected and documented. Yet their collector – who chose to remain anonymous – expressed disdain in his introduction.¹⁸ He stated that these stories were of a low moral level due to the story-tellers' African origins, a continent lacking civilization (Cuenta di Nansi 1899, 94-119). On this Latour also had a clear opinion: while describing Nanzi as a 'wise' figure, in the sense that he was 'sneaky and cunning', while at the same time 'unscrupulous and banally funny', he stated that these stories conveyed no Christian values as they expressed the low moral views of the story-tellers (Latour 1937-1940). Roman Catholic newspapers would often cite the term *kerementu den kompa Nanzi*¹⁹, as synonymous with believing in non-existing phenomena.²⁰

Naturally, this ambivalence affected the manner in which the data were collected and disseminated. The collectors had a negative regard for these stories, but by beginning to collect them, they appeared to recognize blacks as bearers of culture, worthy of attention. Furthermore, the collectors left out the physical and vocal expressions that formed part of





the narrations. In general they did not consider these of importance. I consider this to be incorrect. The verbalizations of story-tellers and their audience are manifestations of their values and judgements regarding certain matters in people's lives.

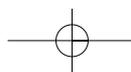
In the aforementioned publication of 1899 the author did point out the *multi-genre* aspect of these stories: the story-tellers made use of sign language, modulations and songs. Latour, in his introduction, also mentioned that story-telling would generally be accompanied by body language: signs, mimicking and, at times, the imitation of animal sounds.²¹ Thus both authors made mention of the elements of performance within these stories. Naturally, these do not manifest themselves on paper. Ruth Finnegan and other authorities, such as Dan Ben-Amos and Harold Scheub, regard this as one of the principal shortcomings of the documentation of tales and songs in an oral performance. The data fall short of conveying the ambiance of the event, as singers and narrators facing a live audience employ gestures, eye contact, intonation, pantomime, historionics, acrobatics and sometimes costumes and props (Dorson 1972:11).

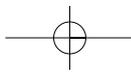
Oral story-tellers often improvise to bring a story to life, and make it seem new by using a different language, a detailed description of settings or magical props, verbal emphases and different voices, salacious, satirical and moral comments and jokes, any assortment of crashes, booms, growls and teeth-gnashing, scary faces and crepe on the fire-lit wall. The gestures, intonations, bodily stances and facial expressions are cues in the oral ambiance, worthwhile paying attention to (Fentress and Wickham 1992:46; Tonkin 1992:38-40).

Another shortcoming of most Curaçaoan folklore data is that they were usually collected outside of their social context (Dorson 1983:362). This is mainly the case with stories gathered at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, when story-telling was a vital part of the culture. Later it would become more difficult to collect stories, let alone within a social context. Richard Bauman, one of the first to research folk performances, emphasizes the importance of social context in the collection of these materials:

the texts we are accustomed to view as the raw materials of folklore are merely the thin and partial record of deeply situated human behavior. If we are to understand what folklore is, we must go beyond a conception of it as disembodied super organic stuff and view it contextually, in terms of the individual, social and cultural factors that give it shape, meaning and existence (1983:362).

This social context includes the conditions under which the story-tellers interact with the audience. What they choose to say is influenced by these conditions, which also means that they receive immediate feedback. A narrative in print may be read centuries later, but it was still produced under specific social and economic circumstances, by an author whose attitude to a perceived potential audience may have affected the way he presented his material. In story-telling both the audience and the narrator affect the content and direction of the narrative; hence any study of oral representation must take into account the contributions of both parties (Dorson 1983:362).





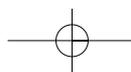
In addition, translating these stories from Papiamentu into Dutch may have led to the loss of important elements. The translations lacked, for example, the numerous accompanying sayings and proverbs providing us with information on the assumptions and ideas of people in the past. Van Cappelle recognized this complication as early as the 1920s. Furthermore, the powerful expressions, interchanged with the sudden sound of soft whispering, the repeated utterances, as well as the gesticulations and the singing of songs in the stories could not to be translated (van Cappelle 1926:202).

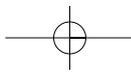
Due to the industrialization process, twentieth-century society underwent drastic changes. This would lead to an increased interest in the waning folk culture within Curaçaoan society. Over the course of the second half of the century a series of works saw the light of day, such as van Meeteren (1947), with Nanzi stories translated into Dutch, Geerdink-Jessurun Pinto (1952), a collection of thirty Nanzi stories in Papiamentu, and Jesurun (1955): the Dutch version of ‘Temekoe-Temebe’, a Nanzi story that had already appeared in Papiamentu in the collection of 1899.²²

Geerdink-Jessurun Pinto’s compilation (1952) is a valuable contribution to folkloric study as it contains the largest corpus of Nanzi stories in Papiamentu published up until then. Since these stories were intended for a children’s programme on the radio, she presented expurgated versions by removing elements deemed improper for children (Baart 1983:14).²³ Her stories, then, are not a verbatim rendition of the original versions. Nevertheless, she recognized that besides being entertaining for children, these stories had a certain scientific value as one could determine the thoughts and values of the people through them. Despite this ideological motivation, Geerdink-Jessurun Pinto undermined this value by practicing censorship so that parts went unpreserved. Richard Wood at Louisiana State University translated all but one of her stories into English (Geerdink-Jessurun Pinto 1973).²⁴ Wood claims that Geerdink-Jesurun Pinto collected them from folklorists, teachers and priests, who had in turn gathered them at the end of the nineteenth century from the story-tellers themselves. Thus, besides her own censorship, these stories may already have been expurgated by her sources.

During the course of the twentieth century people began to realize that oral literature entailed more than only Nanzi stories: tales of other genres were published as well. Examples include Braasem (1956), Henk Dennert (1968), May Henriquez (ca. 1981) and Juliana (1970).²⁵ Even so, Nanzi stories still form a large part of our folkloric material, as they were the most thoroughly documented (Baart 1985; Rutgers 1991).

According to Juliana, the relatively high quality of documentation on Curaçao arises from the fact that these stories transcended class and ethnic barriers as they were often told by the nannies (*yaya’s*) to the children of the elite class. Nannies played an important role in the care of these children and in that way served as transmitters of Afro-Curaçaoan cultural elements. Most of the earlier folklorists belonged to the elite class. These people were already familiar with the stories as they had either heard them in their youth from the *yaya’s* or had known people who passed them on – as such they were important elements in bridging the divide between the popular and the elite class. In contrast, other stories were told behind closed doors, either within the private sphere of the home or as part of ceremonies such as the *ocho dia*, in which rarely a member of the elite participated.²⁶





It remains unclear why these Nanzi stories were accepted by the elite and even found suitable as children's stories, unlike other genres. Herskovits (1941:139) claims that certain African cultural elements could persist depending on the slave-master's attitude towards them, which could range from hatred and distrust to indifference and encouragement. For example, quiet and calm stories generally found more acceptance. Another contributing aspect to their acceptance was their entertainment value, with their trickster-plots and motifs, which were similar to some European stories. Furthermore, the increased attention to Nanzi stories on Curaçao was related to their popularity among the Afro-Curaçaoan population.

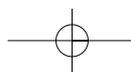
As the Nanzi stories have been more thoroughly documented than others, a broader scientific approach has become possible. They are not timeless as they have been subject to alteration over time, with their main elements remaining intact. Baart (1983) links the stories collected by Geerdink-Jessurun Pinto to those of West African origin and indicates some changes in the Curaçaoan versions. In his comparison of several published Curaçaoan Nanzi stories of the same title and theme he found variations in the recordings of a single story over the course of time. These changes demonstrate how a theme was adapted to the audience, which also indicates specific values prevalent at the time (Bauman 1992:xiv).

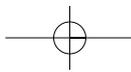
Recorded Folk Songs

At present folk songs are also used as historical sources of knowledge. The folklorist and musicologist Alan Lomax has emphasized this development and claims that of all oral expressions – including stories, proverbs, riddles and sayings – songs are the most important indicators of socio-cultural life. In a society characterized by an extensive oral culture, songs help to direct the attention of the group, to organize the group around a common reaction, and thus create consensus. Their lyrics reveal values that are not openly manifested in everyday life; they often address deep feelings, the verbalization of which is prohibited in other contexts (Lomax and Halifax 1971). Also for Bauman (1983:362), they uncover deeply rooted human behaviour. As they help to expose communal values, norms and perceptions – if systematically analysed – they are considered meaningful sources for gathering data on the way people viewed themselves and their social reality (Lomax and Halifax 1971).

As was the case with stories, the systematic recording of traditional songs began very late on the island. In the United States *Slave Songs of the United States*, by W.F. Allen et al., was already published in 1867. It comprised a collection of songs recorded directly from former slaves. Also in most other parts of the Caribbean, music and songs have long been studied by scholars such as Walter Jekyll (1907), Herskovits (1941), Harold Courlander (1939, 1960, 1963) and Fernando Ortiz (1950).

Some scholars attribute the late recording of traditional songs on Curaçao to the fact that they persistently remained part of the living folk culture. Thus they continued to play a role in society (Broek 1992; Ansano et al. 1992). Another explanation is related to the general tendency by collectors of folklore to pay more attention to stories. Documenting a song meant taking down both its melody and its text. Tales were easier to assemble and to publish. A final explanation revolves around the negative ideas harboured by those able to





record them. As a result, the registering of traditional songs was generally done in a fragmentary manner and mostly induced by a growing interest from outside the island.

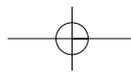
This is illustrated in the travels by the priest 'Ipi' from Curaçao²⁷, who met with interest in Curaçaoan folk songs during a trip around the United States in 1884. Upon his return, Ipi admitted in the *Amigoe* of 28 June 1884 that when asked by his American friends to sing songs from Curaçao, at first he had started to sing Spanish songs, but then his fellow travellers had forced him to sing folk songs from the island. As he was unfamiliar with these, he decided to sing a *kantika di makamba* consisting of sentences of different songs, which did not make any sense at all when put together. This *kantika di makamba* refers to songs which are sung in the extinct African derived language Guene. This is the song 'Ipi' sang (it is impossible to translate due to its incoherent language use)²⁸:

*Dio manoeé
cominda wese
ma bini di awana
Jantje poco bon ¿com bai toer bo roeman?
we sali hende di anoche a sali
pa ta lezi
hoenja lamanta para
lamanta para Dio
ke toe mi man?
Tené mas duro
Tené cha fla mi
Koe mi bai foi mundoe, mi ta jora mundoe
Ta nada. Dio tai Awé ta awé
Go teme vola.*

On viewing the text of Ipi's made-up song, it seems that he used phrases of several *kantika di makamba*; songs such as 'Kumbai yaya, Kuminda Wese, Awe ta awe' and 'Ku mi bai for di mundu', which would at a later stage be integrally collected by researchers such as Juliana, Brenneker, Rosalia, La Croes and myself. Nevertheless, even though this *kantika di makamba* seemed no more than an incoherent enumeration of fragments, it suggests that Ipi must have had some notion of this type of music. It is precisely because of this fragmented annotation that certain data can be placed in their historical context.

Cobi (Lodowicus Jansen), Ipi's brother, who proved more knowledgeable about *kantika di makamba* – even though he lived in town and Ipi in the countryside: one would assume that country people were generally more knowledgeable about Afro-Curaçaoan popular culture – underlined the multi-generic aspect of Afro-Curaçaoan folklore and stated that often these songs formed part of stories. Furthermore, he understood that they were worthwhile preserving as they were transmitted solely by the elderly and so in danger of disappearing. He did not, however, define the term 'makamba'. Neither did he specify the language in which most of these songs were sung.

Cobi issued two *kantika di makamba*. The first told of an owner who treated his slaves badly. When one day he went to look for water he fell into a well. His crying for help was in vain; the slaves sang that the owner had fled (Rutgers 1994:48).²⁹ The lyrics as explained



by the priest express a common belief among Afro-Curaçaoans that an accidental death is a punishment for bad and inhuman behaviour. The second song was about a Dutch *shon* from La Guaira, Venezuela, who was so rich that he rode in a carriage decorated with diamonds.³⁰ Cobi related to Ipi that he knew many more songs.

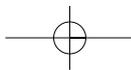
The interest in these songs of father Jansen, alias Cobi, is further manifested in a request in the newspaper *La Union* of 2 April 1890, asking readers to send him *kantika di makamba*. A month earlier, Cobi had mentioned in the same paper songs such as 'Foe-doewe', 'Guiara' and 'Hoenja lamanta para', which he claimed were sung during the harvesting of maize. His petition would prove in vain – in 1953 Latour revealed that Cobi had never received any replies.³¹

Under specific circumstances the priests in the countryside would allow people to play their own music. In 1858, for example, when the construction of the church of Willibrordus was finished, those who had helped building it were rewarded with music created by an old plough³², the sound of half a calabash in water³³ and the blowing of a cow horn.³⁴ Sometimes priests would not mention the actual songs, but only the occasions on which they were sung. In 1902, for example, it was mentioned in *La Cruz* that when people were loading ships, they would do so while singing songs.³⁵ By mentioning this, they recognized that Afro-Curaçaoans used songs and music as an outlet to alleviate hard work.

Catholic priests proved to be primary collectors of folk songs, especially of those appearing harmless and unprovocative to their moral standards. Thus it is not surprising that the genre most often documented were *seú* songs, which were sung during the ceremony of harvesting the maize. These songs were regarded as seemingly innocent expressions of gratitude for a good harvest and less threatening to moral standards than the *tambú* songs accompanied by the drum (itself also called *tambú*), which were sung after the maize had been stored. In April 1890, the priest Jansen (Cobi) asked people to sing their *seú* songs, rather than engaging in the *tambú*.³⁶ Jan Paul Delgeur, who in 1924 in the *Amigoe* condemned the *tambú*, had earlier published a *seú* song in the same paper.³⁷ It had been created to commemorate the priest acquainting the parishioners with a new type of maize.

Different versions of the same songs were collected both on Curaçao and on Bonaire, which allowed for comparisons to be made. The priest B. Krugers describes some customs and cites fragments of songs related to the harvest feast on Bonaire called *simadan* (1907:8-9). In 1934 an article entitled 'Simadam' would appear in the same magazine by W. de Barbanson (1934:25-39), a priest in the village of Rincon on Bonaire in that year. The following year he left for the island of St. Barths. He presented L.C. Panhuys with his data, who had during 1932-1934 written several articles on the folk life of Bonaire in the *West-Indische Gids* (Panhuys 1933-1934b). In one of these articles Panhuys recommended the continued recording of songs in a similar way to that of the clergy, who had documented other customs before they became extinct.³⁸

Panhuys had also published articles focusing on songs in Surinamese folklore. The importance of his work lies in the fact that he internationalized these songs as early as 1909, when he presented a paper on songs of Suriname at the International Congress of Americanists in Vienna and in 1912 his work was translated into French under the title *Les chansons et la musique de la Guyana Neerlandaise* (van Zanten and van Roon 1995:11).



Panhuyts discussed de Barbanson's method of collection: the priest would record a song and then ask people from Curaçao and Bonaire whether they knew it. Lacking modern audio-recording equipment, the priest recorded only the texts. In some of his articles he mentioned different variants of songs. Some, such as 'Bati Lala' (Beat Lala), 'Panama mi ke bai' (To Panama I want to go) and 'Akili Mambea' which he registered on Bonaire, had different versions on Curaçao.

As with traditional songs, the recording of *kantika di tambú* on Curaçao began very late.³⁹ The tambú was a ceremony accompanied by music and dancing, which was performed around the end and the beginning of each year – specifically at Christmas and New Year. The lyrics often commented on events that had happened during the year and which were generally disapproved of. They also referred to individuals, either from the in- or out-group, who had misbehaved and were usually sung by women. The songs created a kind of cohesion and solidarity, and thus reinforced societal values. Sometimes they were aimed at soliciting and arousing outside support and sympathy for a person or situation.

Since the sexual content of these songs was considered immoral by the Catholic Church, very few were recorded by priests. Early references show the stereotypical ideas surrounding them. No civilized person was expected to have anything to do with the tambú. Niewindt, for example, condemned the tambú when in 1850 he referred to the custom as the 'so-called singing or rather shouting of shameless negresses' (Niewindt in Dahlhaus 1924:441). The same condemnation is present in a publication of the agronomist R.H. Rijkens, who accused the blacks of being dirty, drunkards and thieves. 'Their singing', he wrote, 'tortures the civilized ear, as their voice has been damaged by bad quality rum' (Rijkens 1907:58).

Nevertheless de Barbanson would at least partially overcome his prejudice against collecting tambú songs as he mentioned several in his article 'Simadan' on Bonaire (1934).⁴⁰ On that island both the drum and the tambú songs were called *bari*. He emphasized their double meaning. Brenneker and Juliana gathered the tambú songs more systematically. Their collection will be assessed in the final paragraph of this Chapter. Also René Rosalia's aforementioned thesis (1997) was partially based on his collection of tambú songs.

Papiamentu Sayings and Proverbs in Print

The sociologist G. Llewellyn Watson defines a saying as a phrase employed to warn, to remonstrate or to implant the fear of retribution or social control in the consciousness of the listener: the person or persons who need to grasp a situation. He describes a proverb as a short, well-known saying, wise percept or maxim used for a long time by many people to express a truth or point out a moral lesson (Watson 1991:1-2). Scholars such as A.K. Awedoba argue against this definition as it ignores the importance that some societies attach to linguistic and literary features associated with the proverb – 'especially the sharp wit, sarcasm, humour, rhetoric, aesthetic and poetic values of language use' (Awedoba 2000:31). Frequently my informants would use proverbs during interviews, either to lay down cautions, warnings and social ideals, or to reveal certain attitudes considered important in social life. They were also used to trigger reflection and thought, to encourage good



sense and to remind oneself to weigh carefully all the possible consequences of one's actions when pursuing daily interests and activities.

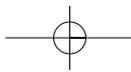
The study of proverbs is useful for determining the values, principles and social norms guiding the behaviour of people (Dorson 1983:184). Historically there has been an interest in Papiamentu proverbs. Although until the beginning of the twentieth century this language was generally considered primitive, the registering of Papiamentu proverbs can be traced to the early documentation of folk narratives. Since proverbs were usually components of stories, they were included when these stories were written down. In that sense the Nanzi stories published by the Society for the Study of History and Ethnology, as well as those in the Roman Catholic weekly *La Cruz*, are important databases. As with other traditions, the Roman Catholic priests were the primary collectors. They would, for example, request their readers to supply them with proverbs, as was the case during the first decades of the twentieth century, when the editor of *La Cruz* repeatedly asked readers to send in proverbs in Papiamentu. He would then proceed to publish those that were nicely corroborating, or at least not defying Roman Catholic moral principles (Broek 1992). In that way the proverbs were used in the classical sense: as didactic forms of speech.

The earlier collectors often explained their motivation and underlined their respect for these proverbs. Cohen Henriquez and D.C. Hesselning, for example, stated that although some were taken from non-documented stories, songs, riddles and legends, this did not mean that they were less literary than, for example, Spanish proverbs. These two scholars were the first to compile a study on Papiamentu and Sranan proverbs, published in 1935 as an article in *De West-Indische Gids*. It was also the first comparison of proverbs expressed in two creole languages spoken in the Dutch Caribbean.

During the course of the twentieth century further collections of proverbs would become available. The *Proverbionan Papiamentu*, printed in 1946 by *La Cruz*, contains a large number. In 1948 Latour gave some examples of proverbs in his article on folklore. Scholars such as van Meeteren (1947), Antoine Maduro (1959, 1960, 1967, 1969), Brenneker (1963), Juliana (1963), Peter Hoefnagels and W. Hoogbergen (1980, 1985, 1991) also dedicated much time to the gathering of proverbs. The book *2000 proverbio i ekspreshon* by Renée Hendrikse-Rigaud (1994) contains the largest collection to date.

Some collectors would indicate the sources of the proverbs. The collector of *Proverbionan Papiamentu* elaborated on his method. He indicated that following his request in the newspaper, he had received about 4000 proverbs from Curaçao, Aruba and Bonaire. He selected 1364 of these for inclusion in his book. The publication was intended as a beginning and not as an end in itself. He asked people 'who loved their language' to react and point out those which were correct and those which were not, and to offer a meaning and explanation, in order to develop a more accurate edition of the book. From his approach it can be concluded that the author supposed that the people had some intuitive notion of what a proverb was and was not.

To understand the meaning of the proverbs used among Afro-Curaçaoans we need to consider how they themselves made sense of them within the context of their language and society. In answering this question the article by Cohen Henriquez and Hesselning (1935) may give certain leads, as it was one of the first analytical studies on the subject. They catalogued 300 Papiamentu proverbs which they had received through three intermediaries:



two women and one man. These proverbs related to subjects such as animals, plants, nature, food and drink, family life, beliefs and body parts. They compared the 300 proverbs with 707 Sranan and 2200 Spanish proverbs. Their conclusion: people who live close to nature express this in their proverbs, revealing that Papiamentu-speaking people were less close to nature than the Surinamese (41.1 per cent of the Papiamentu proverbs referred to animals and nature whereas in Suriname this figure was 50.3 per cent). Moreover, the animal figures, especially of those non-existent on Curaçao – such as tigers⁴¹, elephants and monkeys – were regarded as relics from their African past (Henriquez and Hesseling 1936, 1937).⁴²

Latour also studied the use of animal figures in proverbs. He paid attention to what he called ‘the placing of a proverb in the mouth of an animal’. For example: ‘Kacho di: Taco, taco, di mi ta di mi, di bo ta di bo’ (The dog said: Bow wow, mine is mine and yours is yours). Henriquez had found the following variant: ‘Kacho ta bebe awa: Tekum tekum, di mi ta di mi, di bo ta di bo’ (The dog drinks water: Tekum⁴³ tekum, what is mine is mine, and what is yours is yours, in other words: everyone takes their share).

The majority of these studies do not explain why animal figures are so prominent in Papiamentu proverbs. Watson (1991), who studied proverbs in Jamaican folk culture, notes the conspicuous use of animal figures in this culture, where analogies are frequently drawn between humans and other living creatures. The Jamaican belief that the animals of the field and the birds in the air hold important clues as to the mysteries of the universe – with their actions being an indication of things to come, such as rain or even death – also holds true for Curaçaoan society.

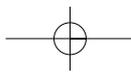
One large omission in all these collections is that they lack context. This should not be overlooked, as a close relationship exists between context, function and meaning (Arewa and Dundes 1964:70-85). Proverbs as linguistic units are subject to general language rules, but their specific meaning is generated in usage. In that sense it is impossible to explain their meaning without referring to their context. For example, proverbs were used as a didactic device for adult members of the popular class – as shown in the case of the Catholic priests and their newspapers (Awedoba 2000:36).⁴⁴

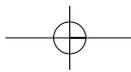
The popular class used proverbs to educate their siblings. Thus, children were warned that ‘Yu ku no ta tende ku mama, ta kai den boka di kolebra’ (Children who do not listen to their mother will fall into the snake’s mouth). In various traditional Curaçaoan stories, songs and other oral testimonies, proverbs are also used to accentuate a certain idea. In many ways they give us insight into philosophical outlooks, as they were intended to put across a moral point. For example, the proverb ‘Pa sabí ku shon Arei tabata, el’ a larga Nanzi gañ’é’ (Even though shon Arei⁴⁵ was wise, Nanzi was able to fool him) emphasizes that the weak can stand up to the strong, by using their wits (*La Cruz*, 1946).

The next proverb, ‘Banana ta muri vipe lo tei’ (The banana tree will die but the sprout will remain), was often mentioned by interviewees to reflect on continuity in the broadest sense of the word.⁴⁶ Here Brenneker and Juliana collected it as part of a song:

Banana ta muri vipe lo tei

*The banana tree will die but there will be
sprouts*





Banana ta muri na mundu vipe lo tei

The banana tree will die in the world, but there will be sprouts

Banana ta muri vipe lo tei.⁴⁷
sprouts.

The banana tree will die but there will be

Proverbs may also occur in serious discussions and arguments. They may serve to clinch an argument or as a means of illustrating logic (Awedoba 2000:35). For example, the sayings ‘Mi no ke mir’*é* ni pintá’ (I cannot stand the sight of him) and ‘Tira e jabi na laman’ (Throw the key into the sea) are used in the following song to highlight the point that a relationship has definitely ended:

Dalia⁴⁸ a lagami sabi ta kiko a sosedé
*Ku mi no kier mir’*é* ni pintá*
*Mi a kontest’*é**
Ku mi a tira e jabi na laman
Telela telela.

My love has asked me what is the matter
Why I can’t stand the sight of him
I answered him
That I have thrown the key into the sea
Telela telela.

Particular mention should be made here of the *banderita*: a short verse in which a person gives a veiled criticism of another in a ceremony at the end of the year. These verses were popular around the end of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century and may have contributed to certain sayings (Berry-Haseth 1994). At the end of each year, people could buy the *banderitas* most applicable to their feelings. They were often used as lyrics for the *tambú* and then sung communally.

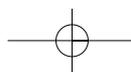
To conclude, proverbs are prime indicators of how people reflected upon their lives. Their use in interviews served to emphasize the importance of certain matters.

Life of the Popular Class

The life of the popular class has not only been recorded by story-telling and singing. Other aspects of daily life have also been collected. In order to get an idea of the life of the populace in nineteenth-century Curaçao these need to be studied.

John de Pool was one of the first authors to make a contribution to this field of study (1935). Even though he generally cast folk customs in a negative light, he gave insight into the cultural life of the popular class by referring, for example, to customs such as the ceremony of the *ocho dia* and the stick fight at the harvest feast of *seú* and the *tambú*. His book contains many personal observations and commentaries, and in this way provides important source material. However, it expresses prejudice against blacks and therefore needs to be consulted with this in mind.

Another important book about folk customs on Curaçao is the previously mentioned *Volkskunde van Curaçao* by van Meeteren (1947).⁴⁹ According to Latour (1948a) the book was exclusively based on oral testimonies, which are difficult to collect on the island as generally people do not like speaking about these matters – they tend to view them as foolish reminiscences – and when they do not know an answer they tend to invent one. Van



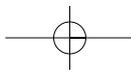
Meeteren himself seemed influenced by Jos Schrijnen, a leading specialist in Dutch folklore (1930-1933). Van Meeteren describes wide ranging folkloric aspects in the life of Afro-Curaçaoans. He occupied himself with phenomena suiting the folkloric canon – ceremonies, rituals, beliefs, clothes, food, manners and musical expressions. His book is, however, a description of certain picturesque aspects rather than a study of their overall contribution to Curaçaoan culture.

Van Meeteren was interested in the origins of specific customs and their comparison with customs in other societies, in line with other early folkloric scholars in Europe. His work reveals an evolutionist approach. According to him, culture developed in stages. He viewed the Dutch culture as the highest one on the Netherlands Antilles. For both van Meeteren and the Catholic clergy the folk ideal corresponded to the anthropologist Robert Redfield's conception of folk (1941). According to this, folk was visible in homogeneous communities: small and isolated, attached to traditional concepts of descent, and guided by simple technology and gender division. Van Meeteren describes customs that de Pool had regarded as primitive and barbaric. A few years earlier, de Pool had thanked the clergy for their eradication (1935).

Why, then, did van Meeteren focus so much attention on the behaviour patterns and beliefs of a culture long repressed and judged uncivilized? Firstly, it is important to point out that he wrote *Volkskunde van Curaçao* on request. Part of it had been presented three years earlier on 'Curom', the local radio. At the time these customs were already on the verge of disappearing. His task was then to document these threatened customs. Latour emphasized the importance thereof when he stated: 'Curaçao has its particularities which are slowly threatening to disappear. If wise people do not write down everything what exists now and study them, soon it will be too late.'⁵⁰

Secondly, the study of Afro-Curaçaoan customs did not necessarily imply respect. On Bonaire, for example, priest de Barbanson who documented traditional songs, would castigate – according to oral history – those found playing and singing the bari.⁵¹ Another priest, Latour, compared the continuation of the tambú to the preservation of the custom of head-hunting in New Guinea (1953). Van Meeteren himself saw the clergy as an educational, civilizing force and he shared this conviction with many of his contemporaries. They observed, with anxiety, the rapid changes within the societies of Aruba and Curaçao due to the industrialization process with its concomitant introduction to 'modern' life and the influx of immigrants with different life styles.

As a consequence of modernization, the working class was no longer isolated. But the new media – such as film, theatre, radio and magazines – were seen by the clergy as a threat to their 'civilizing' mission. At that point in time the populace was no longer considered barbaric and primitive – as had been the case in the nineteenth century – but as people in the process of being civilized. This mission was now threatened by seemingly uncontrollable outside forces. Therefore the interest in what was seen as folklore originated from the fear of a particular group losing its power over the powerless. As in Europe, interest in folklore emanated from nostalgia; however, on Curaçao, the nostalgia manifested itself in an urge to preserve the status quo by controlling the minds of the members of the popular class.



Since van Meeteren does not provide any information pertaining to this, it is difficult to evaluate the method he used for collecting his data. His sources were indirect: not informants but intermediaries. It is also hard to find out exactly who his intermediaries were, and thus how knowledgeable they were on these issues. Related to this is their 'openness' towards someone like van Meeteren – representing the prejudiced elite class. Nevertheless, his book does provide an interesting insight into some aspects of life of the popular class. With it, van Meeteren established himself as one of the leading lights in the field of folklore, for which he was referred to by Latour as 'konosedó di pueblo' (the connoisseur of the popular class).⁵²

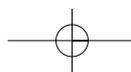
Cross-checking with the Brenneker/Juliana Collection

The prime ethnographic collection of Curaçaoan traditional culture is the corpus provided by Brenneker and Juliana. Even though these scholars also worked individually, they usually collaborated and their body of work is commonly referred to as the Brenneker/Juliana collection. It has become a model for this type of research on the island – no study concerned with the oral history and tradition of Curaçao can overlook their work.

I was able to collect a number of songs on Curaçao which Brenneker and Juliana had previously recorded. The fact that I could record songs in the 1980s which they had already collected during the 1950s and 1960s, from informants older than mine, suggests that these songs were communal and passed on from one generation to the next. In his study on the Calypso Keith Warner (1982) explains that for the text of a song to be remembered, it should be so powerful that it can stand on its own. Through these songs people symbolically construct their world and tailor it with meaning.

Juliana and Brenneker made use of a significant development in the study of folklore, folk life and related studies, which is the sound recording of data. The availability of modern tape recording equipment made this possible. This process led to the verbatim preservation of data as primary source material – available and accessible to fellow scholars (Perks and Thomson 1998). This new method of collecting and recording oral data also found acceptance on Curaçao.

Both Brenneker and Juliana considered the folk culture in black rural communities the authentic expression of the folk character. They usually contrasted rural life with sophisticated, urban life. Banda Bou in particular – the western part of the island – was, due to its isolation, considered an area where this information was conserved in its purest form. Most of their interviewees were thus elderly people who lived in the countryside, the largest number coming from Banda Bou and from the centre of the island. Fewer informants came from Banda Riba, while only a few lived in town. However, the data regarding the area of origin of the informants should be handled with some care. Some of the geographic places registered by Juliana and Brenneker existed both in Banda Bou and Banda Riba. Furthermore, they usually noted the place where they conducted their interviews, which was not necessarily the place where the interviewee had been born or had grown up. In need of care, some had moved in with a family member who lived elsewhere.



Behind the ideas expressed in folklore, Brenneker and Juliana saw the wisdom of these long neglected and supposedly underdeveloped people. Their knowledge and intelligence, rooted in nature, was a 'counter-culture' to that of the elite. Brenneker's interest had been induced by his vision that missionary work must be based on knowledge of the culture of a people.⁵³ Juliana presented his ideas on folk culture as the antithesis to technological development in a series of books entitled *Guia Etnológiko* (1976 and 1977b). For both ethnographers the authentic Curaçaoan culture lay in a life of the past in the countryside, a life which was rapidly disappearing. The older generations, then, were knowledgeable and provided a link to this culture. For Juliana, this search was also driven by personal interest. He distinguished himself as the first black Curaçaoan to focus attention on this type of study: previously both the local black population and the white elite had approached this material with disdain. The elite would remain anonymous when writing on the subject, while the local population would rather not dwell on it.

It would take a long time to get their concepts recognized by the central and island governments.⁵⁴ Their response to folklore related studies was one of disinterest. This would manifest itself in a lack of funding, resulting in Brenneker and Juliana collecting the material largely at their own expense. Due to this lack of funds they were sometimes forced to erase and re-use tapes, thus losing the original information. Only during the 1980s limited support was given by the AAINA. However, when the economic situation on the island deteriorated, this soon evaporated.

Both ethnographers developed a special approach in order to induce their interviewees to talk. This was vital, since at the time people were often ashamed of their past clouded by slavery and poverty. Questions on the subject would easily be interpreted as prying. To overcome this hurdle, Brenneker and Juliana would avoid any direct questions, but instead sit with the interviewees and chat about whatever subject arose. After a time, as they gained the trust, they would explain that they could not remember all that was being said and that therefore they had to either write down the words or tape them. People who initially had been reserved, would then open up. They would become accustomed and not mind singing or talking on tape. For Juliana, this indirect approach was the only methodologically correct way of conducting oral research. He denounced the direct, authoritative, methods of earlier folklorists: they had had insufficient knowledge of the mentality and customs of the older generations and had lacked respect (Juliana 1976).

Brenneker and Juliana complemented one another in their methodology. The fact that Brenneker was a Catholic priest made him more readily accepted by the locals. In most interviews he would be addressed as 'father' and treated with respect. But some of his questions would reveal his position – particularly when they dealt with issues such as belief – and his being a priest may also have affected the response. Juliana's status as an insider, already familiar with key knowledge and traditions of society, would give him many advantages (Clemencia 2004).⁵⁵ When he was present at an interview, he would jog the memory of the informant by asking questions such as 'tell me about so and so... did you know so and so...?' Or he would start talking about an event, and the informant would continue to give more in-depth information.

Also in other ways they distanced themselves from earlier folklorists. Unlike, for example, van Meeteren, they systematically collected and recorded data in all parts of the island.

Their material is thus extensive. As they were also in time to collect stories and songs from elderly narrators and singers who at the time were still alive, they were able to record numerous versions, of songs in particular. Their attention was not limited to specific areas: all aspects of daily life were addressed. As such, they made live recordings of customs like the ocho dia ceremonies, with their special songs of 'dumve', and they also paid attention to the tambú, which former folklorists had either neglected or written negatively about.

Brenneker's ideas on the tambú ceremony are well stated in his series of books entitled *Sambumbu* (1969-1975). He even felt a certain relief that the feast was being revived. In that way, he set himself apart from older priests of the Catholic Church, who had regarded the tambú as devilish and would go on horseback to break up tambú gatherings with their whips. Although these gatherings were therefore generally considered indecent and thus condemned, Brenneker and Juliana made live recordings of them.⁵⁶ In doing so they attempted to capture the performance aspect, an important element of their manifestation. In the recordings one can hear the laughter and cheers of the crowd when the singer would arouse support and sympathy for someone or a situation. This exchange between singer and audience was incited by the use of cunning word play and double meanings; the texts received much attention and had to be carefully thought out in order to trigger a response.

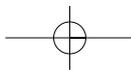
At times Brenneker and Juliana were criticized, and also gossiped about for their engagement in this type of activity. Following his weekly column in the *Amigoe*, in which he had talked about the spirits of the dead and even mentioned names of people who had died in a car accident a few days earlier, Brenneker was reproached by an anonymous writer for this unpriestly behaviour:

Referring to the sambumbu of January 12, I would like to ask father Brenneker the following. How do you know so well that the young man is Pedro Kook. Let him rest in peace. What you are doing is not priestly work, father Brenneker. In that way you are collaborating to the down-fall of the Roman Catholic faith on the island. That is a shame for a 'father'.⁵⁷

In order to make their data accessible to a broader public and safeguard them for posterity, Brenneker would publish regularly in the *Amigoe* and talk on the radio, while Juliana would also appear on radio and television programmes. In some of their publications they would explain the existence of a specific custom in relation to its function. Juliana in particular made attempts to link certain expressions to Africa and the Caribbean. Brenneker tried to explain unknown words in Papiamentu and in Guene, for which he was criticized by the Papiamentu specialist Antoine Maduro.

Brenneker and Juliana were the first to submit their research to the archives. In 1973 they placed them in a foundation under the name of Zikinzá. The corpus of this collection consists of over 1400 songs, stories and short narratives, collected on tape from 267 informants.⁵⁸ They are currently stored at the National Historical Archives in Willemstad.

Though Brenneker and Juliana were amateur researchers, they both compiled a great corpus of data archived for future researchers. Neither received formal training in interview techniques. Their extensive interviews must therefore be analyzed with caution. They



appear to have elicited reminiscences with great skill, but may have lacked the expertise to avoid socially desirable comments from their informants.

Moreover, their gender may have hampered their research with regard to female issues, such as childbirth, menstruation, virginity and conflicts between men and women.

In order to get an overview of the information, I have divided their informants into five categories. The first concerns those born before 1863, the second the group born between 1863 and 1883, the third the group born between 1883 and 1903, the fourth those born after 1903 and the last category the group of which the age was not registered. Especially those in the first category were of interest to me, as in my research I was unable to find anyone who was born before 1883.

Table 2.1 Number of Informants in the Zikinzá-Collection According to Age Group

	Born before 1863	Born between 1863 and 1883	Born between 1883 and 1903	Born after 1903	Date of birth unknown
Males	1	34	59	18	40
Females	2	28	41	15	29
Total	3	62	100	33	69

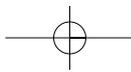
Source: Kontenido di Zikinzá Curaçao 1974

Brenneker and Juliana recorded a large part of Curaçaoan folklore, and their data have been utilized by many scholars, both local and international (see appendix I). They collected several types of songs, categorized them according to how they were named, which was related to their use in social life (see appendix II). Ben-Amos calls this a cultural-central approach and emphasizes that 'the principles underlying indigenous categorization are rooted in the cultural thought, language and experience. The differences in names of genres, in classes of verbal behavior, and in their symbolic meaning reflect essential cultural concepts' (1977:3).

For the purpose of this thesis, I wish to distinguish between work songs for men (*kantika di trabou di hende hòmber*) and those for women (*kantika di trabou di hende muhé*). Both fell under the genre *kantika di trabou*, indicating the purpose for which they were sung. The work songs for men included those for construction work, such as the *kantika di piki* (work with the pickaxe), the *kantika di koba pos* (when digging a well), *kantika di dèmpel* (when filling holes or canals) and the *kantika di mukel* (when using a sledgehammer) Other songs included the *kantika di kore ficho*, which were sung while taking coal to the shore to be loaded onto boats for transportation. There were also the *kantika di rema ponchi*, sung when carrying people on small boats (with flat bottoms) across the harbour. Fishermen sang their own songs, such as the *kantika di bua kanoa* (sung when rowing) and the *kantika di hala kanoa* (when beaching the fishing boat).

For women there were songs for grinding millet in the 'metate'⁵⁹ called *kantika di mula maishi*. The *kantika di bati maishi* were sung while rhythmically pounding millet in the tree-trunk mortar (*pilon*). There were also songs – the *kantika di bati ku tati* – to





accompany the pounding of cactus (*kadushi*) with a mortar called 'tati'.⁶⁰ Through cradlesongs and lullabies, *kantika pa hasi yu drumi*, mothers interacted with their babies and children. Women sang while washing clothes, both in a group or individually. The Brenneker/ Juliana collection also contains segments of story-telling and ring game activities. In all of these songs, the melodious pounding provided a percussion rhythm for the singing.

Besides that, Brenneker and Juliana collected religious songs, such as the *kantika di San Antoni* and the *kantika di San Wan*.⁶¹ And their collection also comprises songs relating to children, love and satire: the *kantika di pleizi* or *tambú*. Through the several *kantikanan di seú* a more detailed view is given of the various songs sung when harvesting and storing the millet in the *mangasina* – while marching to the rhythm of the drum, cow horn and piece of cow plough, the *agan*. In relation to this, both ethnographers collected the sounds of various musical instruments.

Brenneker and Juliana collected stories other than solely the *Kuenta di Nanzi*. The *Kuenta di Luango*, for example, were a genre which received more attention from both ethnographers. Rutgers also writes of an anonymous person who in 1968 describes an experience he had with someone who knew an old Luango story, 'Before White and Black came to Curaçao' (Rutgers 2001). These Luango stories referred to slaves who were reputed to be able to fly back to Africa as long as they had not eaten salt. Those who had, remained behind and sang about those who had flown away – these stories are known throughout the Americas. Most Luango stories – *kantika makamba*, *masapaso* or *makwiba* – were sung, in Guene, and fragments form part of the Zikinzá-collection (Juliana 1988).

Brenneker and Juliana also conducted research in other areas, such as the names of plants and fish as well as nicknames and personal matters. They gathered information on folk beliefs and customs regarding conception, pregnancy, birth and infancy, dating, courtship and marriage, healing and remedies, ceremonial customs, agriculture, death and funeral arrangements. They documented their information in print.⁶²

Their collection also includes a considerable number of artifacts, which also gives us an idea of people's lives in the past. Henry Glassie (1983:377) underscored the idea that artifacts surviving from times past are a direct encounter with cultural expressions and can deepen our understanding of a particular historical period. The artifacts collected by Brenneker and Juliana have a particular value. By collecting them they were able to rescue commonly used utensils from historical oblivion. Since most of these artifacts are clearly working tools and show utilitarian values, they are also important indicators of the economic reality of Afro-Curaçaoans after emancipation.

Haviser (1999) identified artifacts that revealed certain customs through excavated material remains at a kunuku-house on the plantation Knip. For example, during the excavation, coins were found in the walls. This sustains the oral tradition that people when they built their houses would place coins in the corners of the house for prosperity.

Conclusion

The use of oral sources has proven very important in this study of the Afro-Curaçaoan popular class. A large part of the group under consideration saved and transmitted their



knowledge of the past through their oral tradition. This thesis is therefore to a large extent based on oral sources. However, when utilizing these data for studying the past, some difficulties need to be looked at. One of these concerns the problems of veracity and representativeness. It has thus been necessary to look at certain issues in order to guarantee the application of these data for this historical study.

The search for veracity of these data led to their evaluation during different phases. The first was the interviewing process and related transcription. Next, the quality of the questions, the registration of silence, intonation and humour during the interviews was very important. The literal transcriptions gave access to songs, stories and proverbs reproducing the intensity of an event or issue.

Cross-checking the data was essential and was done through the use of different types of documents. One of these were the written records by the colonial government, which often rendered invisible those with little power, but nevertheless allowed me to periodize developments after the abolition of slavery. These documents reflected the spirit of that period and gave the dominant views against which the oral narratives of resistance, accommodation, negotiation or any other type of relationships between people of unequal status could be placed. The government records regarding matters such as population, marriage and land acquisition provided the necessary background to better understand their complex nature.

Folkloric information in print was also used for cross-checking. The dilemma of these data is that they were documented outside the context of the events and issues. They were sometimes biased either by self-censorship of those who expressed them or censored by the collectors themselves. Nevertheless, as the collectors published these data, they provided information which helped to periodize certain expressions of the people and to give insight as to when certain folk songs, stories, proverbs and other aspects of daily life were popular.

The oral data collected by Brenneker and Juliana also proved very useful, as these researchers had been able to interview people born just before the abolition of slavery, who had experienced the transition from a society which knew enslavement to one where everyone was juridically free. Brenneker and Juliana also interviewed people born soon after the abolition of slavery.

The oral data used in this dissertation were selected in accordance with a range of criteria. In the end, these data proved to be indispensable as they sustain, contradict or elucidate information derived from written documents or existing literature.

Notes

- 1 The historian Peter Burke strongly advocates this approach to history, confirming this disposition in several of his publications. See for example Burke 1980 and 1991.
- 2 The role of the older generation in transmitting information is further confirmed in the letter dated 30 March 1889 by Ben of Westpunt, a regular writer in the newspaper *La Union*, who mentioned that the godmother of one of his children, Maria Angelista, used to tell them about the 1795 slave revolt, which she had witnessed. She died at the age of 108. *La Union*, 13-5-1889.

- 3 Interview Inie Sirvanie (born 1-4-1910), Allen, 27-11-1989 (NatAr).
- 4 Interview Eduardo Tokaai (born 1899), Allen, 12-9-1984 (NatAr).
- 5 Interview Victor Bartolomeo (born 1935), Allen and La Croes, May 2000. Private collection
- 6 It was not unique that Brenneker took an interest in documenting the folk culture. In Paramaribo (Suriname) for instance, Father R.M.F. Abbenhuis collected popular songs and plays, which were used by L.C. Panhuys (1932-1933).
- 7 I agree with Uriam (1995:97-8) who explains the distrust among an older generation of anthropologists regarding the reliability of oral tradition by reference to the unprofessional way this source was initially used.
- 8 Carlo Ginzburg (1980) used court records in his exploration of the intellectual and spiritual world of a member of the popular class, the Italian miller Domenico Scandella, born in 1532. Emmanuel LeRoy Ladurie (1975) is also based on judicial records, through which he tried to extract information on the peasants themselves.
- 9 Latour, for example, in his article on priest Vincent Jansen and the construction of the Sint Willibrordus Church, stated that he had talked with many elderly people regarding the construction of the church (1940:12).
- 10 The term 'folklore' was introduced in 1846 by the antiquarian William Thoms. He defined it as matters relating to customs, manners, observances, superstitions, ballads and proverbs. In a rapidly changing Europe the study of folklore became part of a process to glorify the common man and was aimed at recording customs in danger of disappearing. It was a kind of salvage operation principally undertaken by the elite class, who had found in this the remains of their original culture. As a consequence, folklore archives were developed and folklore societies were founded throughout Europe (Dundes 1965).
- 11 Sarah Maza also addresses the problems involved in using folklore as a historical source, even though she uses the term 'oral narratives' instead of 'folklore'.
- 12 They see this problem as part of a larger issue when dealing with memory, namely the relationship between memory as an internal representation and memory as an articulated representation.
- 13 Broek (1988) gives an overview of how Nanzi stories changed over time. In many later publications several versions of one story were presented. Broek attributes this to their continuation. He looked at new versions of old stories and studied the creolization process in these stories by comparing the different versions. See also Broek 1993:15.
- 14 See also van Cappelle 1901. He collected his stories during his field study of exotic animals in Nickerie, Suriname. When the people lay in their hammocks, one of them, surrounded by a few listeners, would start telling stories. Van Capelle's interest was stimulated when he was in Paramaribo and his travelling companion made phonological recordings of Negro songs.
- 15 See also Darnton (1984:17), who referred to the period between 1870 and 1914 as 'the Golden Age of folktale research'.
- 16 Broek 1995; Latour 1937-1940. Since 1919 the *West-Indische Gids* provided an important forum for those interested in the colonies. In 1960 the name of the magazine was changed into the *Nieuwe West-Indische Gids (New West Indian Guide)* and had a broader scope.
- 17 Burke sees this as an important point to take into consideration when reviewing oral information documented by folklorists.
- 18 The author remained anonymous for some time. It was later revealed to be Abraham Jesurun, a member of the Jewish elite (Broek 1995).
- 19 Kompa Nanzi is the name given to Nanzi (in the Dutch West Indies) or Anansi (in the English-speaking Caribbean).
- 20 *La Union*, 8-1-1920; see also *Amigoe*, 28-5-1886: 'Kuenta di Nanzi Is a Lie'.
- 21 There is some confusion regarding the Papiamentu name for these story-tellers. Latour refers to them as *chadó di cuenta*, Jesurun as *hinchadó di kuenta* and the etnonologist Juliana as *echadó di kuenta*.

- 22 Droog (1975) contains the Dutch versions of twelve stories from Geerdink-Jesurun Pinto's collection. Finally, Dennert (1967) and Lauffer (1971) also published several Nanzi stories.
- 23 See also Darnton (1984:9-13), who analysed this aspect for the story 'Little Red Riding Hood' (*Le Petit Chaperon Rouge*).
- 24 In his introduction Wood states that these stories corresponded with the ones he had collected on Curaçao and Bonaire in 1967. Regretfully, he did not compare versions and thus did not signal where censorship was applied to Geerdink-Jessurun Pinto's stories.
- 25 Juliana stated that he had collected the stories on audio-tape and that he had tried to transcribe them as literally as possible, without adding anything.
- 26 The ocho dia was the highlight of a series of prayers conducted by the working class held during eight consecutive nights following a burial. Rutgers (1994:352) mentions a polemic in the newspapers in 1905, following a member of the elite class describing an ocho dia, whereby the question was asked as to why a decent person would participate in such a ceremony at all. See also John de Pool (1935), who denounces the custom of ocho dia as barbaric, which 'luckily' the Roman Catholic Church was trying hard to eradicate.
- 27 Vincent Jansen, a priest in the parish of Willibrordus, Banda Bou, wrote under the name of 'Ipi'.
- 28 See *Amigoe*, 28-5-1884. See also Rutgers 1994:47. Text of the improvised song in the traditional call-and-response style.
- 29 The text is as follows:
El afoedoewe
Yo no me welete a foedoewe
Ma welete,
Ma welete
Ma welete
El a cocodowe
Dowe ma mi foedoewe
Da cuacua
El di dodowe mi el keke
El a mi...
- 30 *Di Guaira de vai de vai ta blancoe di Holanda*
di Guaira
ta kende ta jama de vai?
Di Guaira
Tu blancoe mees di Holanda oé
Di Guaira
Ta fortuna mees a corre kune
Di Guaira
Ta Spanjool mes es canailje aja
Di Guaira.
- 31 The meaning of 'Foedoewe' and 'Hoenja lamanta para' is unknown. Latour 1953:32-3.
- 32 This was probably the musical instrument called the *agan*: part of an animal-drawn iron plough is transformed into a percussion instrument, together with an iron bracelet (*barbá*) and an iron bar (*man* or *manga*). The musician hits the bar against the plough while it leans on the iron bracelet, thus producing a loud metallic sound.
- 33 This was the *bastel*. See Juliana 1976. The *bastel* was also called *kalbas den tobo* (water drum). It was a musical instrument made from a container, such as a tub for washing clothes. The tub was then filled for three quarters with water in which half a gourd floated. The musician played the instrument by striking the gourd with his hands, or with two sticks with a bulb at the end.
- 34 This was the *kachu di baka* (cow horn): a musical instrument played by blowing through the removed tip named *supla*. It was a very important instrument during the harvest feast called *seú*. It was used to guide the people who cut the maize (sorghum vulgare) and, later on in the day, to accompany the *tambú* and again while people marched (*wapa*) to the storage house.

- 35 *La Cruz*, 17-12-1902. See also Panhuys (1932-1933:124) who received a song from C. Stadius Muller, an old finance administrator, who heard it from one of the workers on a plantation where he used to stay. The worker called it 'kanta makamba' and would sing it while churning butter. Stadius Muller could not decipher the song and noted it phonologically:
Zien zien, sabana phrizien, aiko
Pero pero mi kopra
Sabanco mi coquin
Eende soemachie, tsjali, pan
Kakienja, joko pra pra pra.
- 36 *La Union*, 2-5-1890.
- 37 Johannes Paulus Delgeur was born in Rotterdam on 24-10-1869 and wrote under the pseudonym of 'Jan Paul'. On 18-7-1897 he arrived as a missionary on Curaçao. He was a priest in St. Willibrordus, St. Eustatius, Barber and St. Martin and died in Curaçao on 24-5-1931.
- 38 Panhuys (1933-1934a:16) mentioned a first volume of transcriptions of Surinamese songs and a survey of a collection of data on popular songs and plays of Suriname. The songs were collected by brother R.M. Abbenhuis in Paramaribo, who was assisted by J.P.J. Berkenveld, the Surinamese head of a missionary school who knew the traditions of slave and plantation folklore from childhood.
- 39 Of all folk customs the tambú was the most persecuted. During slavery it was feared by the slave-owners, as it offered the opportunity for the enslaved to gather and express disgust at their situation. The songs and dances were heavily condemned by the clergy, who saw them as lascivious and sexually immoral. Also following emancipation the tambú would continue to be heavily condemned by both the government and clergy. Members of the older generation recount the severe forms of punishment exercised by the clergy, including the confiscation of drums, whipping and even expulsion of the participants from the Catholic Church.
- 40 Most of these songs reappeared in *La Union* in September 1940 and in the *Amigoe* in May 1943. They also appeared in van Meeteren (1947), where they were referred to as Curaçaoan folk songs.
- 41 Cohen Henriquez and Hesseling 1935:168. For example 'Lo ke ta den barika di tiger, no ta den montado' (What is in the stomach of the tiger is not in the stomach of the hunter) was compared with the Sranan version: 'Keeskeesi take: di sabi disi de na hem bele, da vo hem: ma disi na sei hem mofo, da vo hontiman' (The monkey says: what is in his belly is for him, but what is in my cheeks is for the hunter). Meaning: what is eaten cannot be taken away, but what is saved can.
- 42 They also concluded that a large number of Papiamentu proverbs originated in the West Indies or were remnants from an African past. In this respect the authors differed from other collectors, who did not refer to the African origin of some proverbs, but usually examined them in relation to either Dutch or Spanish proverbs or even biblical ones.
- 43 'Tekum' refers to the sound made when drinking water.
- 44 In most cases adults use proverbs when talking to children; the reverse is unusual. The youth has less need or desire to use proverbs, which are associated not only with antiquity but also with the wisdom of maturity which traditionally comes through experience.
- 45 The king is called shon Arei.
- 46 Hendrikse-Rigaud (1994:205) explains that the proverb is also used on its own in the form 'Banana a muri, vipe tei' (The banana tree is dead, but the sprout remains), meaning that on the death of the head of the family his sibling replaces him.
- 47 Benito Albino (date of birth and date of interview not registered; Zikinzá-collection, T 185, NatAr).
- 48 Dalia is the name formerly given to a male lover.
- 49 In the Netherlands, 'volkskunde', in contrast to 'volkenkunde', is aimed at the study of the popular class within different European societies. It is used to denote matters which the folklorist W. Thoms (1846) called 'folklore'.
- 50 *La Cruz*, 10-12-1947, 'Saber popular di Corsou pa Sr. N. van Meeteren'.

- 51 The bari of Bonaire, similar to the tambú on Curaçao, implied dancing and singing at social occasions, whereby the drum predominated.
- 52 Latour gave a positive review of van Meeteren's book (*La Cruz*, 10-12-1947).
- 53 Brenneker (1962:1): 'The missionary must adapt his method to the authentic psyche and culture of a people. Thus he must have knowledge of the culture.'
- 54 Already in 1930 the United States government commissioned the collection of narratives from former slaves through the Work Projects Administration (WPA).
- 55 Juliana had been socialized within oral culture as a youngster: during his youth he had grown accustomed to story-telling in narratives and in songs. This was one of the main reasons for his interest. *Amigoe*, 6 -2-1971.
- 56 See Brenneker 1969-1975; tapes Juliana/Brenneker collection stored at the Public Library.
- 57 *Amigoe*, 6-2-1971.
- 58 Of these 267 informants, 115 were female and 152 male. Some informants sang more than one song. The eldest was born around 1853: ten years before emancipation. The lyrics are available in books entitled *Lekete Minawa*, *Benta* and *Sambumbu* – a series on Curaçaoan and Bonarian folk customs. The *Sambumbu* also contain other lyrics collected by Brenneker and Juliana, which are not stored in the Zikinzá-collection. A number of interviews are also stored in the Public Library in Willemstad. The corpus of this archive consists of 110 tapes containing information on all aspects of life.
- 59 A grinder made of coral stone. For a long period millet was the staple food for the black working class.
- 60 'Kadushi' is a type of cactus (*Cereus rebandus*). 'Tati' is a mortar, small in size, in which the cactus is squashed into a slimy substance and cooked with, for example, dry salted fish in a sauce. It is eaten with corn meal called *funchi*.
- 61 Up until the present these songs for San Antonio are expressed on the 13th of June during gatherings in which particularly women show their devotion to the saint. Women petition the saint for certain favours, such as good health for their families and themselves.
- 62 Some examples are Brenneker 1958, 1959 and 1969-1975; Juliana 1969, 1976, 1977b and 1978. He also used the magazine *Kristòf* as a local forum for disseminating this information. See Juliana 1975a, 1975b, 1980a, 1980b, 1983a and 1983b.

CHAPTER III

Afro-Curaçaoan Life and Culture Prior to Emancipation

Introduction

When studying the historiography of the popular class, scholars are confronted with the problem of categorization. Peter Burke, for example, addresses this dilemma in his historical studies on the popular class in Europe (1978, 1991). Usually the 'two-model system' of dividing the masses from the elite is applied, but here the problem lies in determining a criterion for exact division. In which manner does a small group, generally called 'the elite', excel in one way or another with respect to the majority of the population? In his study on mentality and culture in pre-industrial Europe (1988), the historian Petrus Spierenburg recognizes the inherent difficulties in distinguishing between the elite and the non-elite. An additional factor is that there are large differences in values, beliefs and behaviour patterns among the members of the popular class themselves (Sharpe 1991:27).

The situation in the Caribbean is even more complex. Here, class divisions have over time become closely connected to racial, ethnic and colour differences. The formation of these societies was grounded on European colonization, essentially the decimation of the indigenous population and the forced importation of diverse ethnic groups. Today's African presence in the Caribbean is due to three hundred years of transatlantic slave trade. The enslaved and their descendants would remain in the lowest strata of society. They responded to this system of racially based social inequality in many diverse ways.

Although this study does not deal with slavery as such, social life following emancipation cannot be studied in isolation (Olwig 1993:6). Necessarily, the lives of these enslaved Africans revolved around labour; it was the hub around which they formed their social lives. Ira Berlin and Philip Morgan state that 'when, where and especially how the enslaved worked determined, in large measure, the course of their lives' (1993:1). This forced labour as the central focus of life has been studied extensively. These studies reveal the diversity of work carried out by enslaved people in the Americas - leading to different gradations in the slave/master relationships. For example, mining was more demanding than agricultural work, which in turn was heavier than working in the factories and shops. Housework was physically the least demanding. Within these broad categories there were many differences, for example depending on the type of crop to be cultivated. It is generally accepted that work on the sugar plantations was by far the hardest to endure, as the working year of these enslaved people was longer - more hours per day, more days per month - than that of those engaged in the cultivation of any other crop (Berlin and Morgan 1993:4; Thornton 1998:162).

Apart from the actual work, the different plantation regimes were a determining factor in the social life and culture of the enslaved people, according to Mintz and Price (1992). Most slavery studies have dealt with life on plantations producing monocrop commodities for Europe (Beckles and Shepherd 2000:253; Shepherd, 2002). Less attention has been paid to developments on plantations based on a subsistence economy, like most of those on Curaçao. Here the ecology of the area, with its infertile soil and lack of rain, led to the existence of small plantations combining varied activities, such as subsistence farming, horticulture, animal husbandry (focusing on pigs and goats), hunting, fishing and the collection of natural products for export (Hamelberg [1901-1903]1979:82) What are the consequences for the daily life experiences of the enslaved and the freed?

In this Chapter I will outline Afro-Curaçaoan cultural history from the time Africans were imported into Curaçao as enslaved people until the moment slavery was abolished entirely in 1863. I will identify the group, in this study referred to as 'Afro-Curaçaoans' and try to answer the question as to how they were able to conduct their social life within and beyond the different constraints in the period of slavery. Studying the ensuing social structure will help to provide insight into the many ways in which the enslaved established and developed their own institutions and cultures within and beyond the confines set for them by those in power. I will also look at the cultural meanings and values they managed to create within the boundaries of this particular social system.

The Arrival of Blacks on Curaçao

It is probable that during the Spanish occupation of Curaçao (1499-1634), there were already blacks residing on the island, since they also formed part of the Spanish force exploring the Americas. Nevertheless, the arrival of large groups of Africans is linked to the introduction of slavery. It is not possible to state precisely when the first Africans arrived after the Dutch colonization of Curaçao in 1634. One of the earliest records in which they appear as a social group are the instructions of the West Indian Company (W.I.C.) to Jacob Pietas Tolck, director of the island from 1638 until 1641¹. In these, guidelines were given as to how the enslaved people should be dealt with.

As the Dutch became heavily engaged in the slave trade, Africans by definition came to be perceived as economic commodities. Between 1644 and 1717 the island turned into a commercial slave depot. On the basis of the Asiento Contract with Spain, the W.I.C. would sell enslaved people to surrounding Spanish colonies (Kunst 1981:125). Settlers in the New Netherlands would also purchase enslaved people from Curaçao, since they were preferred to those coming directly from Africa, who often were ill on arrival due to the extremely poor conditions on board. In the Curaçaoan depots at Zuurzak and Karké they were allowed to recuperate in expectation of further transportation (Thornton 1998:159; Martinus 1997:125).

Even though few data are available on the number of enslaved people in transit, or the number actually remaining on the island, one can assume that when Curaçaoan society functioned as a transit harbour for enslaved people, little slave labour was required on the island itself. The few indicators of the number of enslaved people present on the island

during certain periods underscore this assumption. For example, in 1668 the Chamber of Amsterdam saw to the importation of food for the 3,000 enslaved people on the island (Hoetink 1958:68). From 1667 until 1675, the peak period of exportation, around 24,000 African enslaved people were shipped to Curaçao (Jordaan 1999:474). Another source shows that in 1683 a contract was signed by the Asientista Juan Barosso del Posso for the delivery of 18,000 enslaved people over a period of six years (Hamelberg [1901-1903]1979:74; Hoetink 1958:68). These numbers exceed by far the 576 enslaved people who worked for the W.I.C. around 1695 and the 1841 enslaved people registered as house- and craft-enslaved people in 1697 (Hamelberg [1901-1903]1979:83; Hoetink 1958:68). Furthermore, the number of enslaved settling on the island would fluctuate, as they were sold by the W.I.C. when faced with economic adversity (Hoetink 1958:68).

From these data it is clear that most enslaved people were merchandise in transit. Those remaining would fulfil the labour needs on the plantations of the W.I.C. These were essentially centres for food production for both resident enslaved people and those in transit, as well as for the crews of commercial shipping. The enslaved people worked the land: they sowed, weeded, harvested and reaped millet - the staple crop. Other tasks entailed the cleaning and maintenance of wells, animal husbandry and the burning of chalk to make lime for masonry work.²

The ratio of male to female enslaved people in the seventeenth century remains unclear. Initially (when Curaçao began functioning as a centre for slave transport) male slaves must have outnumbered the female slaves on the island, as the masters in the Americas generally preferred - young - men, whom they believed to be strong and efficient workers (Berlin and Morgan 1993:12; Moreno Fraginals 1978:19; Thornton 1998:173).

With the ending of the Spanish Succession War in 1714, the importance of the island as a depot began to decrease. This contributed to the breakdown of the W.I.C.'s previous monopoly on the slave trade with Africa. The trade would continue as a private enterprise from the 1730s. Slave prices collapsed. In 1715, an artisan slave was worth 150 to 160 pesos, while in former years the same person cost about 500 to 600 pesos. The W.I.C. was unable to sell many of its enslaved Africans due to reduced demand (Rutten 1992:183). This, combined with other problems - such as rivalries between the white civil servants and the merchants, and severe drought - would affect the social situation of the depot slaves and of those working for the W.I.C. still further. For example, between 1714 and 1720, the food supply from the company diminished. This would eventually push the enslaved into a rebellion in 1716 (Rutten 1992:182). Faced with these difficulties the W.I.C. began to rent plantations out to private people in 1717.

The year 1778 saw the last slave ship entering the Curaçaoan harbour with new slaves (Hoetink 1958:70). Soon, African-born slaves were now outnumbered by the creole-born group. By the end of the eighteenth century most plantations and enslaved people were privately owned (Renkema 1981a:7). This, however, did not result in the authorities relinquishing control over these slaves; they would continue to impose rules as and when it suited their interests.

The dynamics of Curaçaoan society are more clearly revealed as of the late eighteenth century, with improved population statistics on the island available. Data in the nineteenth century, being relatively more reliable than those of former centuries, give an overview of the black population on the island. Even then, Renkema cautions, one has to be careful with these statistics as the registration was not always carried out correctly. Slave-owners often underreported enslaved people in their possession, to evade head taxes (Renkema 1981a:117-8). Until 1840 the Afro-Curaçaoan population is classified as 'Enslaved and Freedpeople' (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 Estimated Population of Curaçao, 1820, 1830, 1840

Year	Total population	Whites	%	Freed manumitted	%	Enslaved	%
1820	14,733	2,555	17	5,195	35	6,983	47
1830	14,511	2,682	18	5,921	40	5,908	40
1840	14,916	2,734	18	6,432	43	5,750	38

Source: Renkema 1981a:336

After 1840 the manumitted former slaves were registered together with the white population as residents (Table 3.2). The number of enslaved people decreased over the years. Their number in the Table varies from the total of slaves really present on the island. In 1863 according to the *Koloniale Verslagen* (Colonial Reports), there were about 5,498 enslaved people on the island, whereas the slave registers of that year report a total of 6,751, with 6,684 of these belonging to private owners and 67 to the government. This is 1,253 slaves more than the number reported in the Colonial Report, from which the figures in Table 3.2 are sourced (Renkema 1981a:118). After due corrections, the total number of enslaved people who received their freedom in 1863 would be 35 per cent of the total population and not 29 per cent as is stated in the Table.

Table 3.2 Estimated Population of Curaçao, 1841, 1850, 1860, 1863

Year	Total population	Resident	%	Enslaved	%
1841	15,544	9,518	61	6,026	39
1850	16,530	10,892	66	5,638	34
1860	19,596	13,634	70	5,962	30
1863	19,127	13,629	71	5,498 ³	29

Source: Renkema 1981a:336-7

There was a clear gender bias in the geographic spread of the Afro-Curaçaoan slave population. The following Table drawn up by Renkema demonstrates that there were more male slaves in the countryside than female slaves. Plantation owners often sent some of their female slaves to work in their homes in town or in those of a third person (Rutten 1989:33).

Table 3.3 Geographical Distribution of the Enslaved Population of Curaçao According to Gender

Year	Countryside (western and eastern)				Town District			
	Male	Female	Boy	Girl	Male	Female	Boy	Girl
1820	1847	1190	980	835	281	918	438	494
1830	1470	1017	819	827	216	765	355	439
1840	1277	998	785	745	206	721	479	460
1848	1170	904	742	664	183	749	428	449
1856	1175	905	811	729	210	811	416	459

Source: Renkema 1981a:122

African Continuities and Creolization

In order to understand the dynamics of the formation of Afro-Curaçaoan culture, many issues need to be addressed - to begin with, the enslaved peoples' African background. This has been a topic of much debate, especially for those in search of African continuities on the island. Since in most cases slave-owners would merely identify their enslaved people's origins by the name of the embarkation port rather than by their ethnic background, this has considerably hindered research.⁴

Another aspect to take into account when looking at origin is that preferences for enslaved people from specific regions would shift over time (Engerman and Genovese 1974:33-49). For example, in 1668 the W.I.C. expressed its dislike for slaves from the areas of River Calabary and Rio Camoronis, who were said to be prone to commit suicide, while thirty years later the company preferred slaves from precisely those areas Knappert 1932:82; Hartog 1961:447).

Postma (1990:106), in his extensive study on African exportations and the origins of enslaved people, mentions different reasons why traders would decide to acquire enslaved people in certain parts of Africa. These were availability, prices, commercial contacts with African leaders, political and economic conditions in a given region, and the demands of the marketplace. It has been established, then, that at the beginning of the eighteenth century, most enslaved Africans destined for Curaçao came from the Gold Coast (now Ghana), Elmina, Fida, Ardra, Accra, Bercou, Angola and Luango (the region north of the mouth of the Congoriver (Jordaan 1999:475; Römer 1979:13). As Hoetink (1958:69-70) cautioned, we need to bear in mind that not necessarily all enslaved people came from

these areas, as they were also caught in the African interior. Berlin and Morgan (1993:13) support this argument and state that slave-owners had little control over the African market; enslaved people were drawn from the interior of Africa to coastal points, from where they would be distributed.

In 1755 the Catholic priest Gambier recorded in a book on baptism the Christian names of enslaved people along with their places of origin, thus giving a possible indication of the diversity in geographical origins of enslaved people on the island and a variety of ethnic backgrounds as well (Hoetink, 1958:71). Gambier registered place-names such as Timbo, Dombo, Congo, Canga, Jamba, Biciba, Luango, Socco, Angora, Amina, Laviras, Carrabbarri, Macamba, Marcambe, Guene, Bobo and Watje (Hoetink, 1958:71). Hoetink (1958:71) linked a few of these to specific ethnic groups in West and Central Africa. Although this apparent heterogeneity must have had implications for the cultural rebuilding in Curaçaoan society, it should be noted that at the time cultural similarities existed between Central and West Africa - even between West and East Africa (Thornton 1998:183-205).

The question as to why certain enslaved people were kept on the island while others were transported, is a difficult one to answer due to the lack of available historical sources (Hoetink 1958:69). Jordaan shows that certain slaves remained in order to assist with the disembarkation of the newcomers. In the beginning of the eighteenth century the W.I.C. used seasoned Luango's as caretakers of the newly arrived enslaved people (Jordaan 1999:478-9). Language skills were probably the primary reason for this, as these assistant slaves were able to communicate with both the new arrivals and the slave-traffickers.

Linguistic creolization was therefore in full swing even if documents show that in the period around 1750 some enslaved Africans still used their native languages. Papiamentu increasingly became the lingua franca both among slaves, between masters and slaves and even within the master class. Written evidence shows that Papiamentu already existed in the eighteenth century and was used as a form of communication among members of the Jewish group on the island (Salomon 1982:368).⁵

The various cultural expressions originating from many corners of Africa - having survived in diverse expressions, songs, stories and place-names on Curaçao - bear witness to these diverse backgrounds. For instance, Papiamentu terms such as 'Luango', 'Bobo' and 'Guene' - originally referring to particular ethnic groups - are still in use. Earlier studies have erroneously concluded that on Curaçao 'Luango' and 'Guene' only have negative meanings (van Meeteren 1947; Hoetink 1958:69-70). According to van Meeteren (1947:233) people from these areas were considered foolish as they spoke a language incomprehensible to others. Yet, as we saw, in the beginning of the eighteenth century the W.I.C. used experienced Luango's as caretakers of the newly arrived slaves (Jordaan 1999:479).⁶

Indeed, some Papiamentu sayings and proverbs still use the term 'Luango' in a negative sense, for example 'Puñá pa luangu, bakoba pa makaku' (A cut for the Luango, is a banana for the monkey), referring to people who allow others to make a fool of them (Hendrikse-Rigaud 1994:293). The priest Putman, for example, stated in a letter to his parents, dated 14 March 1838, that he had heard 'two negroes quarreling, while one of them said: 'Bestia quico bo ta carda [corda?], fer [for?] di unda bo a vini ladron, Luango!'' (Animal, what do

you remember(?), where do you come from, Luango thief?). The other answered angrily: 'Si bo no ta tapa bo boca un bez, lo mi dal bo un bostaa [bofta?], ku bo ta weita culu [kul?] pa un pompoena' (If you don't close your mouth immediately, I will give you a punch, that you will see backside for a pumpkin).

But there are more meanings: in stories the Luango's - and the Guene's - were portrayed as a supernatural people. As previously stated, they were believed to be small people with wings who were able to fly back to Africa if they did not eat salt. The ability would be lost once salt was consumed. This theme can be found in the music and oral literature of the Caribbean and the southern United States. In the Caribbean the myth came to imply freedom - either in the sense of escaping from the plantation or as the ultimate act of suicide (McDaniel 1990:29, 38).⁸

Due to their supposed ability to fly, the Luango's and Guene's enjoyed a certain prestige; one of my informants referred to them as 'sabí di e tempunan ayá' - the wise people of those days. The following quotation comes from a man born in 1898; this information had been passed on to him by his elders.

R.A.: *Di kon a yama nan 'Luangu'?*

C.E.: *Pasó nan no tabata hende djaki. Nan a bini di un parti di Afrika. E tempunan ayá, e shonnan tabata bai kumpra hende pa traha pa nan. E luangunan tabata bula bai bini. M'a krese tende esei i mi a tende ku e shonnan tabatin hopi trabou ku nan pasó nan tabatin ala. Nan tabata bula bai bini, bula bai bini, bula bai bini, te un biaha nan a bula bai sin bini bèk. Sí, ta asina ami a lanta tende. Asina ami a lanta tende ora mi tabata krese.*⁹

R.A.: *Why were they called Luango's?*

C.E.: *Because they were not people from here. They came from a part of Africa. At the time, the shons (the slavers) would go and buy people there to work for them. The Luango's used to fly back and forth. I grew up and heard that they (the shons) had great trouble with them because they had wings (emphasis on wings). They flew back and forth, back and forth, back and forth, until they flew away, never to come back again. Yes, that is the way I heard it. That is the way I heard it when I was growing up.*

The informant clearly focuses on this ability to fly, which represented freedom and independence, and thus contrasted with the constraints of enslavement. Similar powers were attributed to the Guene's:

C.E.: *M'a lanta konosé un señora ku tabata biba na Montaña. E tabata kabes di e labaderanan di Newport. E tabata yu di un gueni. Su tata tabata un gueni. E tabata un muhé chikitu asina. Ami a tende ku e gueninan tin ala, pero esaki no tabatin ala. Tur esnan ku tin ala a bula bai. El a ked'atras i el a traha na Santa Bárbara. El a ked'atras, pasó el a kome salu. P'esei el a ked'atras.*¹⁰

C.E.: *I grew up and knew a lady who used to live in Montaña. She was the head of the washer women in Newport. She was the child of a Guene. Her father was a Guene. She was a small lady. I heard that the Guene's had wings, but this lady did not have any. All those who had wings flew away. She stayed and worked in Santa Barbara. She stayed back because she had eaten salt. That is why she stayed back.*

The informant made a distinction between the Guene, who had not been born on the island, as opposed to those who had been born on the island.

The term 'Guene' also refers to a language, as the following quotation indicates. The informant sang several songs in Guene - taught to him by his elders - called the *kantika di guene* or *kantika di makamba*. The notion of origin is not only present in the generic name given to these songs, which were mostly sung during work¹¹, the informant also addressed his ancestry and the legacy of his family, while he defined the Guene in relation to his race.

E lenga, nos ta bisa, nos tawela ta bisa, nos tata ta bisa ta lenga di gueni. Wèl niun di nos no konosé e hendenan ku a papia e lenga ei. Nos a tende solamente ku nan tabata biba den e mundu akí promé ku nos a bin biba akí. Nos ta nan rasa. Ta esei hendenan a konta nos. Tabatin algun di nan ku por a bula. Esun ku a kome salu no por a bula bai. Esnan ku a kome salu, a ked'atras. Nos ta nan rasa. Esei mi tawela a bisami. Awor akí nos ta kanta e kantikanan na gueni, pero e tempunan ei, nan no tabata kanta e kantikanan so, nan tabata papia gueni manera nos ta papia papiamentu awor.¹²

The language, we say, our grandfather, our father, say, is the Guene language. Well, none of us here know those people who spoke the language. We only heard that they lived in this world before we lived here. We belong to their race. That is what people have told us. There were some of them who could fly. Those who had eaten salt could not fly away. The ones who ate salt stayed back. We belong to their race. Our grandfather told us. We now sing songs in Guene, but at the time, they did not only sing them, they spoke Guene the way we speak Papiamentu now.

Another example is given by the singer Shon Tin (born in 1886) from Ma Louisa (eastern part of Curaçao). He told Brenneker that an enslaved man bid farewell to his friends and then sang the following song as he rose from the ground and flew away:

*Le mai mundu eh leba ho
Le mai mundu eh leba ho
Le mai mundu eh leba ho
Limania go eh saino
Limania go eh mira pa bo numa
Ma limania go eh saino¹³*

*I am in trouble¹⁴
I am in trouble, man
I am in trouble
If you see God
Give my compliments to him
If you see God*

It is evident that the terms 'Luango' and 'Guene' have multiple meanings in Curaçaoan society, which have not been sufficiently recognized in past studies.

Further references to Africa are present in traditional songs, many of which are stored in the previously mentioned Zikinzá-collection.¹⁵ A fragment of one such song about Africa, which was introduced by the singer Reini Laker, 72 years in 1959, from Seru Fortuna (centre of Curaçao), reads as follows:

*Zaba ta keje keje zaba tu nama we
Shon Grandi na Ulanda
Su nabiu ta na Gene
Zaba tu keje keje zaba tu nama we
Shon Grandi na Ulanda
Su nabiu ta na Ginewa
Shon Grandi na Ulanda
Su nabiu el a bai ku kanao¹⁶*

*Zaba ta keje keje zaba tu nama we¹⁷
The big master in Holland
His ship in at Guinea
Zaba tu keje keje zaba tu nama we
The big master in Holland
His ship in Guinea
The big master in Holland
His ship, he went by canoe¹⁸*

In his study on Guene, Frank Martinus analysed a variant of this song sung by another person (age unknown), who stated that Guenewa stands for Africa.¹⁹ To substantiate this argument Martinus quotes Norman Cameron (1934), who had found that Northern Melli was called Guinea at the time - afterwards it became French Guinea and since its independence in 1958 it is again known as Guinea (Martinus 1996:200).²⁰

Finally, several place-names which have remained in use on the island also have African origins: 'Popo' (a piece of land in the eastern part)²¹, 'Kongo' (also in the eastern part)²², 'Kanga' (in the centre), 'Poz Luango' (in Willibrordus), 'Serká Luango' (in the western part) 'Calabari' (near Santa Maria)²³, 'Africa' (the burial-ground for the enslaved on the plantation of San Juan), and the 'Seru di Mandinga' (a hill in the eastern part of the island) (Brenneker 1969:23). Oral tradition has it that an escaped slave of phenomenal strength used one of the caves of the *Seru di Mandinga* as a hiding place. To survive he tended a garden and regularly killed animals of the slave-owners in the neighbourhood. He was never captured.

Slave Labour as the Hub of Life

As the island's position as a slave depot began to decline in the beginning of the eighteenth century, a large number of private people began taking up ownership of plantations and enslaved people. Especially in the beginning of Dutch colonization some had made attempts to introduce cash crops for export - such as sugar-cane, cotton and indigo, as in the rest of the Caribbean - but since this generally proved unsuccessful they would usually grow subsistence crops, the primary one being millet (Renkema 1981a:7, 18). The few masters growing cash crops owned the largest plantations, some of which housed over one hundred enslaved. But generally Curaçaoan plantations were small, with the average slave-master owning less than five slaves.²⁴

Labour was a determining factor in the life of enslaved people. The annual cycle of the field work - planting, hoeing, tending the crops and harvesting - structured many aspects of plantation life: the cycle of work began following the rainy season in October, when the millet was planted. Then the plot was hoed and protected against insects, pests, weeds; and close to harvesting also against birds, which could spoil an entire crop. In March or April the millet would be harvested; the celebration of this event would include the entire plantation's population, while enslaved people from neighbouring plantations would also participate. Both masters and slaves were familiar with this type of festivity.

West Africans, the majority among the enslaved Africans, used to be farmers and knew harvest celebrations such as the yams (a major West-African crop) festival, in honour of the god of fertility (Rattray 1923). The folklorist Roger Abrahams (1992:xxii) describes a similar phenomenon on plantations in the deep south of the United States. He sees this type of event as 'part of a process going on at the plantation in which the enslaved neither divested themselves of their African cultural heritage nor acculturated to the behaviors and performance patterns of their masters'. To the enslaved people the harvesting of the millet signalled the end of the agricultural cycle, after which they would be employed in other types of work, such as tending the animals; most plantations kept cattle, pigs and goats.

The common labour division being field-, house- and craft-slaves - implied a certain hierarchy. For example, artisans were highly valued and they were the ones with better chances to acquire the means to buy their freedom. But this diversification did not apply to the smaller plantations, where all may have been put to work in the fields (Renkema 1981a:126). At the same time enslaved people also worked in non-agricultural environments. When there was no work at the plantation they would, for example, be hired out to work in town or for the government. In this way, in 1766 the owner of plantation Porto Mari, Helena Lesire-Kinnegem, received 5.383 pesos for masonry work undertaken by a few of her enslaved people who helped build the Fort Church.²⁵

During the first half of the nineteenth century the number of plantations containing salt-pans increased considerably. In the dry season the enslaved people would be put to work on the salt-pans, while during the rainy season they worked the millet fields. Salt was exported to Spanish colonies and to the United States (van Soest 1977:34). This type of work was arduous. The combination of sun and working with bare feet in the salt water was referred to as *buamentu di salu*, hard and unhealthy labour. In 1857 these slaves even received 25 cents per week for food, thus also showing the beginnings of a wage economy.²⁶

Such hardships survived in oral traditions. In 1989 I interviewed Clemens Bonifacio, who at the time was 82 years old. He related certain aspects of working on the salt-pans at the beginning of the twentieth century:

*Nos ta lanta tres or di mardugá. Mas trempañ, asina bo por hasi uso di e airu fresku. Och'or di mainta nos ta stòp di traha i nos ta regresá kuat'or di atardi. Ora tin luna yen nos ta traha te diesun or di anochi. Den sukú ta difsíl traha. Tabatin hende ku ta koba salu ku piki. Nos ta yena makutu ku salu. Bo no por yena e makutunan yen yen pasó bo mester laga e awa sali. Despues nos ta pone salu na monton.*²⁷

We would wake up at three in the morning. The earlier the better, so you could benefit from the fresh air. At eight in the morning we stopped working and returned at four in the afternoon. If there was a full moon we would work until eleven o'clock in the evening. In the dark it is difficult to work. There were people who dug salt with a pickaxe. We would then fill the baskets with salt. The baskets should not be filled completely as you had to leave the water to drain. Then the salt was placed on piles.

Enslaved people would also work as carriers in towns or in shipyards. This diversity in occupations is clearly shown in a list of slaves escaping from the island made in 1775. Cooks, bakers, fishermen and sailors are registered (Klooster 1999:506), but also occupations such as violinists and drummers serving the recreational needs of their owners.

In times of economic adversity, male enslaved people would often be hired out to work as seamen in order to provide an income for their owners, although this was not entirely without risk to their owners - 16.6 per cent of runaway enslaved people were sailors.²⁸ This pattern, labelled by Neville Hall (1985) as *maritime maroonage*, has been a common thread running throughout the Caribbean; on Curaçao the enslaved would often escape as soon as the ship reached a port.²⁹ Those who returned to the island would have done so due to family ties (Price 1966:1371). They may have been exposed to other slave cultures in the Caribbean where, for example, the import of new enslaved people from different areas of

Africa continued well into the nineteenth century. These maritime Maroons may therefore have stimulated cross-overs in African identity-building in the Atlantic.

The nature and intensity of female participation in slave-work was determined by the economic viability and size of the plantation. Women generally worked the land in the same way men did, and both sexes fell under the generic name of '*chap* [hoe] negroes'. These workers planted, tended and harvested the millet at the appropriate times of year (Renkema 1981a:115-6). Older female slaves looked after the poultry. Women were also hired out as domestic servants in town. On the larger plantations, slave women would also work as seamstresses, washerwomen, ironers, makers of straw hats or as midwives.

Social Life under Slavery

Curaçaoan slave society did not simply consist of white masters on the one hand and black enslaved people on the other. There were different forms of classification, linked to both class and race. Levels of status seem to have continued within the slave community. Initially, *within* the group of enslaved people, diversification was made according to the length of time a slave had lived on the island - as illustrated by the proverb 'Es ku bo wela luangu a siñabo awe, di mi krioyo a siñami ayera kaba' (literally: What your grandmother Luango taught you today, my Criollo grandma taught me yesterday). Even though both persons referred to are *criollos*, as both were born on the island, the one whose parents were also born on the island (and in this case even grandparents), felt superior to the one whose parents and/or grandparents came directly from Africa - newly arrived slaves were referred to as *bozals* and were at the bottom of this hierarchical scale.

Indeed, as Jordaan (1999:479) has stated, the nature and length of residence on the island enhanced one's position. This corresponds with the general sense of superiority of creole enslaved people in the Americas, which was attributed to their familiarity with the condition of enslavement.³⁰ These slaves were delegated positions of authority and laboured independently, while the ones born in Africa - the so-called 'saltwater slaves' - had to perform the meanest tasks, and solely under supervision (Berlin and Morgan 1993:11). In contrast, the creoles were accredited because of their language skills and their familiarity with the landscape and work. In addition, they supervised the newly arrived. The Papiamentu saying 'Si bo fòrsa buza, buza ta papia latin' (If you force the bozal [Africa-born slave] he will even speak Latin) underscores the idea that bozales could be forced to learn and do many new things.

With the increase of coloured people, one's skin colour became the deciding factor for social mobility.³¹ Legal discrimination was introduced. Hair texture and the degree of one's skin pigmentation became important markers of identity. In general, colour, as in the rest of the Caribbean, was rated in descending order as follows: *whites*, *quadroon*, *mesties*, *koesties*, *mulato*, *sambo* and *blacks* (Teenstra 1977:167; van Dissel 1857:111-112). These terms were like a summary of a combination of qualities, which to some degree were probably internalized by the Afro-Curaçaoans themselves. Those of mixed race (both enslaved and freedpeople) were also categorized as 'coloured'. The term 'coloured people', *hende di kolo*, meant that one had a lighter and therefore more 'appropriate' skin colour, thus with

slightly better chances for upward mobility. Afro-Curaçaoan women especially could reach certain positions on account of their lighter complexion. They were more likely to be chosen to work within the household of the enslaved people's owner; they would work, for example, as *yaya*'s (nannies) and as domestic servants (Römer-Kenepa 1980).

Attitude towards colour remained ambiguous. Sexual intercourse with black women was generally believed to have curative effects on certain diseases. 'Pretu ta kura' (Black cures) used to be a common expression. Furthermore, white mothers who were unwilling or unable to breastfeed their children, would choose a black woman to give milk instead (Brenneker 1970:10). In the same vein black animals were believed to have special qualities: the milk of a black cow was thought of as more wholesome than that of a white or spotted one.³² During the oral history project of the plantation Porto Marie, an informant recalled that the plantation owner instructed his driver (*fitó*) to preserve the daily milk of a black cow for a weak baby born on the plantation (Allen 2001b).

Several studies have shown that coloured people too suffered from white elite's stereotypes regarding their racial and slave backgrounds. Planters still regarded them with contempt and treated them with little respect (Renkema 1981a:95). Mulattoes were considered arrogant and pretentious, and were therefore disliked. Even though lighter coloured people would have family members still under slavery, they often manifested racist attitudes towards those with a darker complexion (Oostindie 1995:161-2; Oostindie 1997:57). Thus, colour also led to tension and antagonism within the black population itself. One's skin and other phenotypes, such as hair, mouth and nose, became elements determining beauty. Announcements of runaway enslaved people not only included physical characteristics such as gender, age and distinguishing marks, but also labelled racial features subjectively.³³

Awareness of one's social position, decreed by one's skin colour, was expressed in certain songs.

Yoradó yora yoradó yora
Até kolo anto kolo ta kolo ku yama kuku
Yoradó yora
Nan di mi keda ketu
At'é kolo anto e kolo
*Yama kolo di kuku*³⁴

Cry crier cry crier
It is the colour and the colour of kuku (kuku is
a type of local black fruit)
Cry crier
They told me to shut my mouth
It is the colour, the colour of kuku
Call the colour of kuku

This awareness also appeared in proverbs, such as 'Den gera di blanku, pretu ta keda mal mirá' (In a quarrel among whites, blacks are the ones to suffer), 'Na tera di galiña, kakalaka no tin bos' (In the land of the hens, the cockroaches do not have a voice), and 'Kada rea ku su para' (Every pot with its own ear).³⁵

The following work song also deals with the issue of self-perception. During the interview I conducted in 1986 with Nicolaas Petrona (born 1898 in Kent U Zelf, eastern part of the island), he recalled the following *tambú* song. His mother had told him that some house-slaves had made this song under the instruction of their master when Tula, the leader of the largest slave-revolt ever, was hanged in 1795. Petrona mentioned this to show the extent to which the slaves lived both mentally and physically under the rule of their

masters. His explanation indicates as well that slave-owners also made use of the musical role of the *tambú* as a vehicle for transmitting messages.

*Papa Sewe,
Ata Negru tribí
k'a lanta ku Blanku
Papa Sewe,
Ata Negru tribí
k'a lanta ku Blanku
Hork'é
Mat'é³⁶*

*Papa Sewe,
Look at that insolent Negro
who stood up against the Whites
Papa Sewe,
Look at that insolent Negro
who stood up against the Whites
Hang him
Kill him*

This song identifies two social groups, 'Negru' and 'Blanku', thus showing the importance attributed to race. It clearly pervays a value judgement regarding Tula's behaviour: he did not abide by the rules of submission but revolted against them. The verb *lanta ku*, 'to stand up against', is considered a negative action; it is mostly used in the context of a person standing up against someone in a higher social position - for example a labourer versus his employer, a child versus its parents, women versus men etc. Tula, a black who resisted the subjugation by whites, is thus viewed as an insolent person, *un hende tribí*. In 1959 Brenneker and Juliana collected a song with a similar text and value judgement. According to Brenneker his informant stated that the slaves threw hot mud in the faces of those who tried to capture them.

*Zino papapa zinowé
Neger tribí
k'a lanta ku Blanku
Zino papapa zinowé
Tula tribí
ku traha papa
Zino papapa zinowé
Tula tribí ta hala lechi.³⁷*

*Zino papapa zinowé
The insolent Negro
who stood up against the Whites
Zino papapa zinowé
The insolent Tula
who made porridge of mud
Zino papapa zinowé
The insolent Tula is milking the cows (profit-
ing?).*

The following work song also collected by Juliana and Brenneker deals with self-perception. An informant gave this song to me in 1984. At the time he was 84 years old. His parents had taught him the song. His explanation alluded to the emotional barriers the enslaved people had set up to fight stereotypical notions of themselves. This agrees with Genovese's theory regarding the paternalism of slavery. Although based on the situation in the south of the United States, this theory contains certain elements applicable to the Caribbean - and, in our case, to Curaçao. According to Genovese, in order to facilitate living together within the same setting, both masters and enslaved people needed to balance their self-interest with their respect for others. Paternalism, accordingly, was a way of protecting both groups from excesses possibly resulting from their separate, unequal positions. While this required an acceptance of the relations of super- and subordination within slave society, in contrast it also implied the recognition of the humanity of those, supposedly, lesser human beings (Genovese 1974).

My informant used animal figures to demonstrate his argument and explain the song. The lyrics reflect an understanding of the ambiguity of the socio-economic system, in which, ironically, those in power depend on those without power. The bird he used to symbolize the powerful, the Warawara (Caracara or Crested Caracara), is a local bird of prey - a mighty one in the hierarchy of birds. However, in this song the bird depends on a small fly for his survival.

Kinono solele
Nochi pa solete
Ni karni ni yò yò
Ni karni ni yò
Ni karni ni yò awe
Ni karni ni yò
Ni karni ni yò
Ni karni ni yò³⁸

Kinono solele
Evening is falling
Not even meat or salted meat
Not even meat or salted meat
Not even meat or salted meat today
Not even meat or salted meat
Not even meat or salted meat
Not even meat or salted meat

The Warawara sings that he has been unable to get meat or *yòrki* (sundried and salted goat's meat). He has been flying the whole day looking for food. The night is arriving and he is flying home. Suddenly, as he passes a fence and his wings go 'gògògò', a small fly coming from a dead donkey sings the following in Guene, which I was unable to translate.

Ata tokòròkò
Wawa'é
Ata tokòròkò
Wawan'é
Sayaneva

As the Warawara continues to sing that he has not found any food, the small fly comes out of the bush. Then the Warawara sees the food. The informant concluded that it had been the small fly who led the big Warawara to the food.

When determining the nature of the interaction between owners and enslaved people, one should take into account precisely who exercised control over the plantations. An absentee land-owner living in Europe, as was common elsewhere in the Caribbean, was not known on Curaçao. However, local absenteeism was found in many places on the island (Renkema 1981a:99). The planters would own a second house in town and live there during certain periods. Owning a house in town indicated that the owner had commercial interests other than managing a plantation. In 1819, for example, only sixty per cent of the island's plantation owners lived entirely off their plantations; 38 years later, in 1857, this was less than fifty per cent. The management was usually left in the hands of an overseer, the *fitó*, who formed an intermediary between enslaved people and masters (Renkema 1981a:99; Allen 2001b:12). Because of his position, the *fitó* could be approached when in need. But he was not always loved, as is shown in the following song published in *La Union* of 8 September 1937. The author states that it was sung during the times of slavery. The lyrics critically portray the manner in which the relationship between the plantation owners and their overseers is experienced.

*Ora shon ta parti ko'
Kasi tur ta pa fitó
Mas tirano e diabel ta
Mas stèrki su sòpi ta*³⁹

*When the shon is handing out things
Nearly everything is for the overseer
The more tyrannical that devil is
The stronger his soup is*

Specific expressions in this song indicate subtle protest. The phrases ‘mas tirano e diabel ta, mas stèrki su sòpi ta’ imply that the fitó is rewarded according to the way he treats the enslaved people: the harsher the treatment, the bigger his reward. This song thus implicitly condemns those who were delegated by the slave-owners to take command over the enslaved’s lives. Ironically, some overseers were even chosen from the groups they would oversee; according to Renkema (1981a:99) some were black.

There was also condemnation of the *bomba*, who in the main was a male slave working as a superintendent: supervising the work of the enslaved people and seeing to it that the plantation’s rules were obeyed. If they failed, the bomba could exercise his authority through physical punishment. On some plantations the bomba was employed and the larger plantations had more than one bomba (Renkema 1981a:128-30). According to Rutten (1998:2796), there were also female bomba’s.⁴⁰

His powers are evident in the way he would punish disrespectful enslaved people. A typical example of this is the 37 year old Lodewijk, who received forty lashes with a rope as he had behaved disrespectful to his bomba.⁴¹ Because of their intermediate positions - they strove to engender the trust of their master and to assert their authority over the enslaved people - bomba’s sometimes behaved very wickedly and were therefore much disliked by their fellow slaves.

In some cases bomba’s were killed during slave riots, as in 1750, when a bomba named Cadjo was shot down by his fellow enslaved people. Or in 1766, when a bomba was poisoned by two slaves whom he had caught stealing maize. In carrying out their revenge they sought the help of a well-known herbal specialist (Rutten 1999:2796). The use of poison for revenge shows the continuation of an act practiced within Africa.

Some bomba’s were known as *sutadó* (castigation loving). From their recurring appearances in traditional songs and slave-narratives commenting on their wicked behaviour, one can deduce the impact they had on people’s lives. In the song on Bastian Taniwá, ‘Bomba yama katibu pa mi’ (Bomba, call the slave for me) two voices are present: that of the slave-owner who tells the bomba Taniwá to go and fetch a slave to be beaten, and that of another person, who says that the slave is good and that Taniwá should let go of him (‘O, bomba laga katibu bai di dje’).⁴²

Several songs and stories focus on Ba Balentin, or Buchi Balentin, a bomba who was known for his malicious character. The interviewee Henriette Willems referred to him as Satan, the devil in her song ‘Oliande mama’.⁴³ Ba Balentin became an important figure within oral tradition, in which conflicting feelings of respect and hatred were manifested. He was known to have fathered many children on the plantation of Kenepa. Many people I interviewed, despite portraying him as a wicked person, claimed to be one of his descendants. Roberts (1998:52) explains this kind of ambivalent attitude by stating that the introduction of black foremen in slave society had a profound influence on the black perception of both the self and the relationship with the master. These foremen were the most

representative and visible members of their class, and their position of authority and responsibility signified an important change in the social structure of the slave system. But it was also an acknowledgement that blacks were indeed human beings.

In the following song Ba Balentin is called an insolent black who has shared a meal with whites. The song was based on his relationship with a widowed plantation owner.⁴⁴ Once again, the song is an act of recognition on the one hand (Ba Balentin has been able to transcend the race barriers) while an accusation of treachery on the other hand.

*Papa misinowe
Papa misinowe
Negru frijpostu a kome ku blanku
Papa misinowe
Papa misinowe
Buchi Balentin a kome ku blanku*

*Papa misinowe
Papa misinowe
Insolent slave has eaten with a white
Papa misinowe
Papa misinowe
Buchi Balentin has eaten with a white*

Some details of Ba Balentin's behaviour were given to me in an interview with Imelda Valerianus, who was born in 1915.

R.A.: *Na kua plantashi Ba Balentin tabata bomba?*

R.A.: *On which plantation was Ba Balentin the bomba?*

I.V.: *Na plantashi di Kenepa. Ba Balentin tabata un bomba hopi mal hende. E tabata mi tawela. E tabata mi famia. Mi no por ninga. Tin bisá ku e ta para na porta di habitantenan di kunuku. Tur ta pretu. E ta bin para na porta di plantashi ku intenshon di bati hende. E ta bin para puntra pa kandela. E tempu ei hende ta kushiná den wea poné riba tres piedra, riba kandela. E ta bin puntra pa kandela. Purá purá hende ta manda nan yu bai buska pida palu kayente. E muchanan tin ku kore su tras. E ta riba kabai, i si e kandela paga, enter e famia di e mucha ta haña sla.⁴⁵*

I.V.: *On the plantation of Kenepa. Ba Baletin was a wicked bomba. He was my grandfather, thus he was my family. I cannot deny that. It is said that he would come at the door of the inhabitants of the plantation. All of them were black. He would come at their home, already with the intention to beat the people. He would come and ask them for some fire. In those days people cooked in pots placed on three stones heated by branches of wood. He would come and ask them for some fire. The people had to rush and ask one of their children to get a piece of the heated wood. The child had to run behind Ba Balentin, as he was on horseback, and if the fire of the piece of wood extinguished, the whole family of the child would be beaten.*

The following song is also about Ba Balentin and regards the relationship he had with many women on the plantation. It says that Balentin, the son of Machacha, would eat their flesh and leave the bone, meaning that little was left of the women after their relationship with him.

*Mi t'ei bai Kenepa
Bai mira Balentin
Brisa
Mi t'ei bai Kenepa
Bai mira Balentin
Brisa*

*I am going to go to Kenepa
To see Balentin
Brisa (chorus)
I am going to go to Kenepa
To see Balentin
Brisa (chorus)*

Mi t'ei Kenepa
Bai mira Balentin
Brisa
Balentin ei!
Balentin
Balentin di Ma Chacha
*ku a kome karni laga wesu*⁴⁶
Mi t'ei Kenepa
Bai mira Balentin
*Brisa*⁴⁷

I am going to Kenepa
To see Balentin
Brisa (chorus)
Balentin eh!
Balentin
Balentin of Machacha
who ate the meat and left the bone
I am going to Kenepa
To see Balentin
Brisa (chorus)

It is generally thought that the enslaved were treated relatively well on Curaçao, at least better than elsewhere in the Caribbean. Lamur (1981) considers the high fertility pattern on the island proof of their relatively good treatment. He believes that the high birth rate among slaves was not solely due to demographics - a young average age when first giving birth, short intervals between births, and few women never bearing children - but also to socio-economic aspects, such as the nature of the work, the small plantation units and the greater proportion of whites in Curaçaoan slave society. On sugar estates the fertility rate was generally low and the death rates twice, sometimes three times as high as on coffee and cotton plantations.

Römer (1977) states that by working enslaved people on Curaçao to the extreme, a slave-owner could only fail, due to the harsh natural conditions on the island. The expression 'Katibu no por hecha banana' (A slave cannot make bananas ripe) may be a good analogy.⁴⁸ Other studies have opposed this notion of good treatment, noting several examples of brutal treatment on the island (Paula 1992). Moreover, there were also times when the enslaved resisted their master's demands en masse: the revolts of 1719, 1750 and 1795 are confirmation of this.

In my opinion, these debates regarding the treatment of slaves on Curaçao lead us to miss the more central issues of enslavement, that is the commodification and dehumanization of human beings under any system of slavery. In order to understand the social life of enslaved people, attention should be paid to the flexibility of social relationships and interactions between the groups of different social and economic positions despite the constraints of enslavement.

In the course of the nineteenth century the Dutch government introduced several laws and directives regarding the punishment and treatment of enslaved people (Renkema 1981a:130-40). A gradual transition to a more humane approach to the enslaved is indicative of the institution of slavery beginning to wane. Many slave-masters, who were no longer allowed to punish their slaves themselves, considered this an infringement of their rights. The enslaved, meanwhile, became more aware of their rights and started resisting certain types of work and complaining about the work (as the new law allowed) to their masters.⁴⁹ According to testimonies of former slaves the perception of slave-owners ranged from good to bad. A *bon shon* looked after their well-being, did not beat them, gave them sufficient food and allowed them spare time. The concept *bon* was used in the sense of just. The *mal shon*, in contrast, enjoyed watching his slaves being beaten (while they had to say thank you for every whip), or would allow a beating to last until he had finished smoking his

cigar. Some sayings refer to this distinction. The expression ‘E ta manera katibu di mal shon’ (He/she is like the slave of a bad master) is used for someone who has to work very hard to survive, and ‘Mi no ta katibu di mal shon’ refers to a person who is experiencing difficulties in life and believes he deserves better. Finally, the terms ‘mal shon’ and ‘bon shon’ indicate close contact between slave-owners and their slaves, and show that the latter made a distinction between the two, within the limited confines of their situation.

In a similar vein enslaved people behaving insolently were called names. To be called a ‘katibu sobèrbè’ (impudent) or a ‘katibu salbèchi’⁵⁰ (wild) meant to be an unruly slave. This could have applied to someone being disrespectful to the master, either by answering back or refusing to work. An overview of punishments carried out by the police between March and December 1857 shows that 8 cases out of a total of 76 dealt with these types of offence.⁵¹ Several laws allowed the planters to punish such a slave themselves, or to report the incident to the Procurator of the King (de Smidt and Schiltkamp 1978:3-8; Gehring 1987:456). The term ‘katibu kastigá’ referred to a slave who was punished.⁵²

Other stories demonstrate how enslaved people ingeniously undermined the control of their master and how they used tricks while undergoing punishment. Shon Pa, who was interviewed by Brenneker and Juliana, claimed that ‘some wise (*sabi*) people tied canvas clothes on their buttocks. When they would be beaten by their masters, the canvas would take all the beating. They would shout very loud but it was the canvas that received all the blows.’⁵³

Certain aspects relating to the treatment of enslaved people have lived on through oral tradition in place-names. Descendants remembered several places where slaves were sent to be punished. One of them, *Plenchi di Berdat* (the Square of Truth), otherwise known as *Plenchi bai no bolbe mas* (the Square of leaving without returning) or *Plenchi bai sin bolbe mas* (the Square of no return)⁵⁴, was situated on the plantation of Ascencion. This suggests that on some plantations enslaved were punished in public as a way of setting an example to others.

L.B.: *Mi mama tabata konta nos di e lugá ei na Asenshon. Nan tabata mara nan. Nan ta trese katibu for di otro lugá pa bati nan i mata nan. Nan ta dera nan ei. Na Plenchi di Bèrdat. Bai sin bolbe mas.*

E.J.: *Komo katibu bo sa ku si nan hibabo Asenshon ku bo no ta bini bèk. Serka di e plenchi ei mester tin sobrá di hende.*

L.B.: *Mi mes a haña basta kos eibanda. Despues e doñonan a yena e lugá.*⁵³

L.B.: *My mother used to tell us about that place in Ascencion. They would tie them up. The enslaved were taken from elsewhere and were beaten, to be killed. They would bury them there. At the Plenchi di Berdat (the Square of Truth). The Bai sin bolbe mas (the Square of no return).*

E.J.: *You would know as a slave that once they took you to Ascencion you would not return. Near that square there must be some remains of people.*

L.B.: *I myself have found many things there. Afterwards the owners filled up the place.*

Some remembered a certain post to which slaves were tied in the woods of Santa Barbara, in the eastern part of the island:

P.B.: *Nan tabatin un pilá den mondi di Santa Bárbara, kaminda nan ta mara e katibunan?*

H.G.: *Mara nan na pilá. Nan ta kòrta algun palu i e katibunan ta keda ei. Nan no ta haña kuminda i nan ta muri di hamber. Asina mi wela a kontami.*

P.B.: *Anto warawara ta kome e kadaver.*

H.G.: *Warawara ta kome nan kadaver. Tabatin hopi warawara, yuana ei... Tabatin un bomba ku yama Piet Aronchi.*

P.B.: *Piet Aronchi.*

H.G.: *Piet Aronchi. Anto eeh... tabatin un muhé na estado (informante ta baha bos). Mi no sa di ki manera, pero e bomba ei a manda nan koba un buraku i pone e muhé na estado ku su barika den e buraku. E muhé ta na estado, anto Aronchi a manda un hòmber bati'è, keda bati'è te ora el a kaba di huma su sigá. Despues ku el a kaba di huma su sigá, nan a saka e muhé for di e buraku... Mitar morto... Mi no sa kiko a pasa kuné despues.⁵⁶*

P.B.: *There was a post in the woods at Santa Barbara they would tie the slaves to?*

H.G.: *Tie them to the post. They would cut down some wood, and the enslaved would remain there. They would not receive any food and die of hunger. That is what my grandmother told me.*

P.B.: *And the warawara bird would eat the corpse?*

H.G.: *Warawara would eat their corpse. There were many Warawara's there. Yes Warawara, yuana... There was a bomba called Piet Aronchi.*

P.B.: *Piet Aronchi.*

H.G.: *Piet Aronchi. And eh... there was a pregnant woman (here the informant lowers her voice). I don't know in which way it was, but he made them dig a hole and had the pregnant woman placed with her belly in the hole. The woman was pregnant and he made the man beat her until he finished smoking his cigar. When he finished his cigar the woman was taken from the hole... Half dead... I do not know what has become of her.*

There are many stories of pregnant enslaved women being placed with their bellies in a hole so that they could be whipped without harming the unborn child. They have become part of a collective memory, thus showing the impact of these events upon the community.

R.A.: *Shon Elisabeth su mayornan a konta di sklabbitut?*

C.E.: *Wèl, nan tabata konta nos di e tempu di sklabbitut. No mi mama, pero mi wela. El a bisa ku den tempu di sklabbitut hende mester a traha mashá duru, pasó shon a kumpra nan. Nan tabata biba riba kunuku di shon. Nan tabata planta pa nan kome. Tin biaha ora nan hasi un kos malu, shon ta manda bomba bati nan. E 'yùfrounan' ku tabata na estado, nan tabata koba un buraku pone nan barika aden i bati nan.⁵⁷*

R.A.: *Did your parents talk to you about slavery?*

C.E.: *Well, they would tell us about the time of slavery. Not my mother, but my grandmother. She said that in slavery time, people had to work very hard, because the shon had bought them. They lived on the 'kunuku' of the shon. They planted for them to eat. But sometimes the shon, when they had done something wrong, would order the bomba to beat them. For the misses who were pregnant they would dig a hole, lay them with their belly in it and beat them.*

Pregnant females were not exempt from heavy physical work or punishment. It was not until 1857 that a law stipulated that pregnant and nursing women, along with children, the weak and the elderly, should be given lighter work (Renkema 1981a:135). On a plantation

in San Juan there was a special room for women in labour. Although enslaved women would also work as midwives, a midwife helping to deliver babies on a plantation would not necessarily be a slave.

There were also stories about escapes. Not all escapees fled the island; there are several stories preserved in oral history, attributing strong character to those who were able to survive as runaways on the island. The story of Wan Pe, for example, is a recurring theme in oral tradition. He was glorified as a special person able to defy the slave-master in several ways. Yet when his master was sick and was carried in a hammock to town, Wan Pe forgave the hardship and helped carrying his master. The moral of the story being that although Wan Pe was treated badly, he bore no grudge against his owner and helped him when in need. Below is part of an interview where the name of Wan Pe was mentioned. At the interview the oldest daughter and a friend of the 90 year old interviewee were also present. Unlike the interviewee, her friend did not want to say anything. She only gave a proverb to strengthen the story.

Yu muhé (50 aña): *Nan tabata konta hopi historia. Tata mes tabata konta hopi historia di Tula.*

I.V. (ta grita): *Mi-Wan-Pé-di-Toya.*

Yu muhé: *esei ta e katibu ku a hui i kai den pos?*

I.V.: *Mi-Wan-Pé tabata hòrta den Santa Cruz. E ku... ki yama esun?*

Yu muhé: *Wanchi Kla?*

I.V.: *Wanchi Kla. Pasobra nan tur dos a bai hòrta den hòfi di Santa Cruz. Un dia nan a bai hòrta atrobe, el a bisa e sua di dje ei no kome e milon. E milon ta pegabo. E sua a hòrta e milon tòg, (e tabatin hamber, no). El a kom'é, el a pega te tosa. Anto ora el a kuminsá tosa, hendenan a tende. Nan di: 'Ta ken?' E di: 'Ta Ken? T'ami Wan Pedro di Toya.' Hendenan a kore su tras. E tabatin un pampuna den su man, el a dal e den pos. Un hende di: 'Até akí. El a kai den pos. Ora nan a bai busk'é, nan no por hañ'é. Dia ku shon Muhé tabata malu, ku nan mester a buta shon Muhé den hamaka, karg'é pa hib'é Punda, Wan Pé a mira ku nan no tabata karg'é bon. El a sali for di kaminda e ta. El a pasa man, dreña bou di e hamaka, karga shon Muhé bou di kantika di gueni bai pariba. Anto shon Muhé a bisa nan pa no mishi kuné mas. Te awor akí niun hende no saunda e buraku ta na San Kristòf kaminda nan tabata kanta kantika na gueni.*

Daughter interviewee (50 years old): *They used to tell us many stories. My father himself used to tell us about Tula.*

I.V. (shouts): *Me-Wan-Pe-di-Toya.*

Daughter: *that is the slave who ran away and fell into the well?*

I.V.: *Me-Wan-Pe used to steal in Santa Cruz. He and... what's his name again?*

Daughter: *Wanchi Kla?*

I.V.: *Yes, Wanchi Kla. Because both of them went to steal in the orchard of Santa Cruz. One day, they went to steal again, and he told his brother-in-law not to eat the melon. The melon would choke him. The brother-in-law did not listen, (he was hungry, you see). He ate the melon and choked and he began to cough. People heard the coughing. Someone said: 'Who is there?' He said: 'Who is there? It is me, Wan Pedro of Toya (nickname of his mother Victoria). The people went after him. He had a pumpkin in his hand and he threw it into the well. Someone said: 'Here he is. He fell into the well.' When they went to look for him they could not find him. One day the female owner of the plantation was sick, and she had to be carried in a hammock to town. Wan Pe saw that they were not carrying the hammock correctly. He left his hiding place, went under the hammock and carried the lady singing his guinea songs all the way to town. The female owner ordered to leave Me-Wan-Pe alone. Up until now nobody knows where the hole is on the Saint Christopher's hill where guinea songs were heard.*

Yu muhé: *Nan di Mi-Wan-Pé tabata drenta den un buraku anto nan tabata tap'é gewon. Riba seru di San Kristòf.*

I.V.: *Mi-Wan-Pé-di-Toya Ta bon ku e no a mustra niun hende e lugá. Kaminda e ta drumi niun hende no sa.*

Otro muhé presente: *'Bo no mester konfia ni bo planta di man, pasó e ta manda bo boka.'*⁵⁸

Daughter: *they say Me-Wan-Pe used to go inside a hole and cover it just like that. On Saint Christopher's hill.*

I.V.: *Me-Wan-Pe, Viktoria's son... Fortunately he did not show any one. Where he used to sleep nobody knows.*

Friend of the interviewee: *'You must not trust even your own hand, because it controls your mouth.'*

Slave Life: Economy and Material Culture

Work divided the lives of enslaved people into two distinct worlds and economies (Berlin and Morgan 1993:2). One world was organized by the master, although contested and constrained by the enslaved people; the other was organized by the slaves, although contested and constrained by the master. In securing a measure of economic independence enslaved people would achieve their greatest successes where masters were most vulnerable. The more vulnerable the master, the greater the enslaved's bargaining power, with the niches, in which their fragile economic independence rested, increasing. An important aspect in the organization of the economic lives of slaves - apart from the nature of labour, the requirements of particular crops, the seasonal rhythms and the organization of production - was the master's need to ensure subsistence for his enslaved people (Berlin and Morgan 1993:42).

On Curaçao, the principal way of providing food for the enslaved people was, as we have already seen, an integral part of slave-work. The amount of food given to slaves was regulated soon after the insurrection of August 1795 - by the Law of 20 November 1795 (Paula 1974:314). Previously, the law had only stated that enslaved people should be fed 'properly' (de Smidt and Schiltkamp 1978). This new law allocated more food to male enslaved people than to female slaves: they were given five and four cans of maize respectively per week. This allowance was increased in 1824 and in 1857. As of 1824 all enslaved people received an additional can from October until March, as during this period work was at its most intense with the planting and harvesting of the maize. Children would receive an amount according to their age. In 1857 both female and male enslaved people received six or eight cans of maize-flour per week during the whole year. Even so, these laws were not necessarily abided by, since food production was always a major problem on the island: provisions could be difficult to obtain (Renkema 1981a:135).

Views differ as to the quality of the slaves' diet. While some considered it to be nutritionally very poor, others stress that it was rich in protein.⁵⁹ The Curaçaoan Island Regulation did not specify meat or any other products. In contrast, the diet of enslaved people in the United States included game and sweet potatoes (Gaspar and Hine 1996:27). According to oral tradition a shon on Curaçao would deserve the predicate 'bon' when he regularly killed an animal and added its meat to the food of his slaves.

Curaçao's climate and soil were unfavourable to agriculture. The special Thanksgiving and Prayer days prescribed by the government in the eighteenth century give an indication

as to how frequently drought prevailed on the island (Kunst 1981:212). Renkema's overview of harvest failures during the nineteenth century is also telling in this respect (1981a:86). But the drought not only harmed the crops, it also affected animal husbandry, which was undertaken as an alternative to subsistence. The island did not know the meadow system. Animals - mainly goats - grazed freely on reserved areas (Hamelberg [1901-1903]1979:92).

Confronted with these climatic difficulties, slave-owners had several options. During droughts, for example, they would import flour of inferior quality from the United States to be distributed to the slaves.⁶⁰ Or they would allow them to work elsewhere, and with their share of the money earned, they would purchase what food they could. It was common in times of economic adversity for the elderly and the handicapped to receive their freedom, so that they had to fend for themselves. Stealing food from the plantations was also common practice, as is documented in police records.⁶¹ The priest Putman, who was interviewed by the State Commission (installed in 1853 to prepare for the eventual emancipation and to devise measures that would improve the plight of the enslaved people), stated that slaves stole from both their owners and the free black population in their bid to overcome hunger (Staatscommissie 1856:34).

One solution was for the slave-owners to allocate land to the enslaved people, enabling them to grow crops for their own consumption (Staatscommissie 1856:42). Berlin and Morgan (1993:42) indicate that these practices, including the importation of rations from outside the plantation, were not mutually exclusive and that they differed from place to place and changed over time. Some slave societies in the Americas depended almost exclusively on rationing, while others relied on slave provision grounds for most of their food. More frequently, plantations developed a mix of imported and estate-grown foodstuffs on the one hand, and the independent production of food by enslaved people on the other. Slave-owners would allow, encourage or force their slaves to fend for themselves when provisions were expensive or difficult to obtain (Staatscommissie 1856:42).

Millet, also named *maishi chiki* or guinea corn (Renkema 1981a:86), was the primary crop slaves would grow from the earliest days of settlement when given a piece of land - called *kunuku*. They were familiar with this crop as it was grown in Africa (Thornton 1998:155). Due to its familiarity it was popular amongst slaves.

Some enslaved people were allowed to keep chickens and goats, to plant vegetables and to sell their produce on the market. The Guinee fowl, called *galiña guene* (*Numifa meleagris*), was an African breed introduced to the Caribbean which quickly naturalized to its new environment (Watts 2000:144). This fowl reflects the religious outlook of the black popular class, as well as its communal values: up until the present it is believed that with its black and white feathers the fowl has magical powers and can protect the home against evil air (*mal airu*). Because of these alleged supernatural powers the hen was not eaten, but left to pick up any evil substances left in the yard.

Studies have shown that enslaved people used their recreational time to work on their allocated land; their owners would sometimes give them time off for this purpose.⁶² Enslaved people were exempt from the 1820 Law prohibiting people from working on Sundays and public holidays, as they were allowed to work a piece of land for their own purposes on these days.⁶³

Slaves on Curaçao generally worked shorter hours than was typical on Caribbean sugar and coffee plantations, where during harvest they had to work even through the evening. They could thus devote time to their own subsistence after they had finished their day's work. Their working hours and holidays were stipulated in the above laws. The Law of 1795 defined the working hours from 5 until 11 o'clock and from 2 o'clock until sunset (Paula 1974:314). This was further extended in the Law of 1824: from sunrise until sunset with a two-hour break, according to the historian Renkema (1981a:132, 135) - a ten-hour workday. However, the Roman Catholic Church was critical of the fact that these rules were not always abided by.⁶⁴ The Zikinzá-collection contains several songs indicating this, such as 'Bomba a nenga merdia'⁶⁵ (The bomba has refused to give them resting hour at midday) and 'Ta merdia'wo bomba' (It is midday now, bomba).⁶⁶ The following song also supports this criticism. Here again the message is coded. It is not the slave who is talking, but a bird called 'sokle', or 'choke'.⁶⁷

*Sokle a bisa mi bomba ta merdia awor
Sokle a kanta, mi bomba na Wacawa, ayá*

*Sokle a kanta, mi bomba na Paradera ayá.*⁶⁸

*Sokle said, my overseer, it is already midday
Sokle has sung, my overseer, yonder at Wacawa
(plantation in the western part of the island)*

*Sokle has sung, my overseer, yonder at Paradera
(part of the plantation of Sint Hironimus, also
in the western part of the island).*

Furthermore, the laws also stipulated the days when the enslaved people were free, which were Sundays and holidays. But this did not apply to herdsmen, gardeners and servants. As with the governmental food stipulations, owners did not necessarily abide by these rules, as eclectic documents reveal (Dahlhaus 1924). Besides growing crops to feed themselves, the enslaved people fished, hunted and gathered food in order to supplement their diet. Those who fished often borrowed boats and nets from the plantation owners. In return they had to hand over part of their catch (Staatscommissie 1856:285). This gave enslaved people an opportunity to develop their own domestic economy. Price states that fishers were a privileged subgroup among the enslaved.⁶⁹ They were more trusted by the slave-owners and possessed more freedom than other slaves (1966:1370).

Plantation owners issued special permits to allow hunting on their lands. Among the animals hunted were deer - at the time already under threat of extinction - and a red-haired rabbit, which existed in small numbers on the island (Teenstra 1977:263). Other animals, such as land crabs, were hunted with torches. Pigeons, such as the bula deifi (*Zenaidura auriculata*), the ala blanka (*Columba corensis*) and totolika (*Columbigalinna passerina albivitta*), were also caught. And iguana (*Iguana iguana*) - a speciality even today - was hunted. They were caught by throwing a rope made of horse hair around the neck of the iguana (Paddenburg 1819).

Some enslaved people engaged in small-scale trading, thus taking advantage of the limited possibilities available to them within their master's economy. They would also sell products from the land in town for their masters (de Smidt and Schiltkamp 1978:337). As early as 1710, the then director of the island Abraham Beck forbade some local residents to allow their slaves to sell anything other than vegetables, fruits, meat or fish in the streets.

This prohibition was enforced due to slaves smuggling goods such as silk, linen, wool and other merchandise and selling them at a low price (Brito 1989). There were also cases where gold and silver were sold. Several laws were promulgated prohibiting this and stipulating terms for punishment (de Smidt and Schiltkamp 1978:253-4).

From the beginning of slavery, enslaved people also stole animals, which is clear from the introduction of the Law of 15 July 1715, prohibiting Indians, but also blacks, both freed and enslaved, from catching young horses, marking and selling them (de Smidt and Schiltkamp 1978:129). Several overviews of the punishments given during the nineteenth century indicate that enslaved people did not only steal food, but also material goods, such as tobacco, silver spoons, ox-hides etc. An example was the case of Teresa, a 19 year old female who had taken some small items on credit in the name of her mistress. For this offence she was chained for a month.⁷⁰

Social Life

One of the primary questions in this thesis regards the organization of domestic life and particularly marriage. Most studies have concluded that enslaved people were not allowed to marry. However, this conclusion is based on a western notion of marriage, where a couple is recognized as being married when their relationship has been formalized according to certain legal regulations, as in the colonial motherland. Very little has been done to analyse whether, and if so how, slaves were able to develop their own customary ways of social relations despite the threat of forced separation through sale, relocation of their owners or on the death of their owners.

First of all there are some indications that enslaved people were willing and able to establish a nuclear family life. The overview given by Jordaan regarding slave family organization on the W.I.C.-plantations in 1717 shows a variety of family compositions. Out of the 47 families, 40 per cent consisted of a man and a woman; 27 per cent of a man and a woman with one or more children; 4 per cent of three generational families; 25 per cent of a woman with children; 4 per cent of a man with children (Jordaan 1999:483). Thus, the extended family type was also present, as sometimes families of three generations, consisting of grandmothers, mothers and children, would live together (Renkema 1981a:134).

However, a stable family life could be hindered by their possible separation - mainly occurring to men and women - at any moment. For example, an overview of the punishment given by the police to enslaved people between March and December 1857 shows several cases of men and women being separated due to their behaviour, for example leaving the plantation regularly or staying out at night without the consent of their master.⁷¹ Some enslaved people left their plantation to visit their partners elsewhere.

M.D. Teenstra, who visited the Dutch islands and Suriname in 1828-1829 and in 1833-1834, stated 'that neither on Curaçao and in Suriname there is something such as family law. Children of 7 and 8 years old are being sold for 70 and 80 guilders, without their mothers being asked for permission' (1977:168). The relationship between mother and child was sometimes unstable. Renkema mentions a case in 1836, when a slave mother

requested to be sold together with her sons. But only her two sons were sold. With help she later tried to kidnap them, but did not succeed (1981a:134). The traumatic effect of the separation of mothers from their children has lived on in oral traditions and songs. The following song was collected by several researchers and is still alive. According to Brenneker and Juliana, who first discovered it, it speaks of slave children who were separated from their mother. They compare themselves with hens.

*Katibu ta galiña, mama
Katibu ta galiña!
Shon ta bende nos, mama
Katibu ta galiña!*⁷²

*Slaves are chickens, mama
The slave is a hen!
Slaves are chickens, mama
The slave is a hen!*

The following song also relates to this separation, but here it is linked to punishment. Hulia Jechi Isberto, born in 1881, had heard it as a small girl and explained that a slave mother who lived on plantation Blauw, as she was punished to stay in a hole, feared that she would die and never be able to see her eight children again. As a punishment she preferred to be sold together with her children.

*O Beilo, ma mi ta mama di ocho yu
O Beilo Shonnan, bendemi bende mi yu
O Beilo, ma mi ta mama di ocho yu
O Beilo, yangadó di tera abou⁷³
O Beilo yangadó janga numa
O Beilo, yangadó di tera abou
O Beilo Shonnan, bendemi bende mi yu⁷⁴*

*Oh, Beilo but I am a mother of eight children.
Oh, Beilo Master, do sell me with my children
Oh, Beilo but I am a mother of eight children
Oh, Beilo waggler from 'tera abou'
Oh, Beilo waggler keep on wagging
Oh, Beilo waggler from 'tera abou'
Oh, Beilo Master, do sell me with my children*

It was not until 1839 that laws were promulgated outlawing the separation of a mother from her children under the age of twelve (Renkema 1981a:133). Yet this practice was not entirely wiped out, as the following statement by an informant born in 1883 suggests. She recalled that her father's duty as a young slave boy was to look after the chickens on the plantation. However, this abruptly ended when he was sold to a doctor in town. He stayed there until emancipation, after which he returned home to live with his sister, his mother having died.

R.A.: *Ma Tuda su mayornan a konta Ma Tuda di sklabitut?*

G.A.: *Mi tata tabata konta nos di dje. E tabata hasié semper ora nos kaba di kome. Promé ku nos resa rosario, promé ku nos bai drumi. E ta konta nos kiko su bieunan a kont'é. Nan tur a muri.*

R.A.: *Kuantu aña papa tabatin ora el a muri na 1921?*

G.A.: *Mi no sa. E tempunan ei hende no tabata sa kuantu aña nan tin. E tabata bisa ku el a nase durante tem' di katibu. Tempu e tabata*

R.A.: *Ma Tuda, did your parents tell you about slavery?*

G.A.: *My father used to tell us about it. He would always tell us after we finished eating. Before we prayed our rosary, before we went to bed. He would tell us what his elders told him. They are all dead now.*

R.A.: *How old was your father when he died in 1921?*

G.A.: *I don't know. In those days people did not know their age. He used to tell us that he was born during slavery (tem' di katibu).⁷⁶ When he*

chikitu un døkter a bin pidi doño di plantashi un yu di katibu. E døkter tabatin mester di un hende pa limpia su ofisina. E doño di katibu a pidi mi wela, mama di mi tata, pa laga mi tata bai. Mi wela a yora, bisa: 'Si e bai, mi ta pèrd'é.' E doño di: 'Nò, e døkter ta sòru bon p'e. Ta døkter e ta.' Mi tata tabata un mucha e tempu ei, e no tabata bai skol ainda, ni lès di katisashi. E døkter tabata biba na Punda. Su nòmber ta døkter de Veer.⁷⁵

was a small boy, a doctor came and asked the owner of the plantation for a slave child. The doctor needed someone to clean his office. The owner asked my grandmother to let father go. She cried out: 'Oh, if he leaves, I will lose him.' 'No,' said the owner, 'the doctor will take good care of him. He is a doctor.' My father was a small boy then, he was not going to school yet, neither to catechism lessons. The doctor lived in town. Doctor de Veer was his name.

Article 17 of the Law of 1857 stated that enslaved people would be punished if they neglected or failed to take proper care of their children, or if they would beat them in an inhumane way (1857/2). One wonders whether this regulation was introduced on humanitarian grounds or served to protect the slave-master's possession, or both.

The communal life that enslaved people were able to construct was necessarily restricted. The Roman Catholic Church played an important role in the creation of a community, as it offered opportunity for social interaction. Since the beginning of slavery, baptisms provided a good opportunity for this. Euwens describes how the enslaved often walked into town on their free Sunday to participate in a baptism at the Sint Ana Church - until the beginning of the nineteenth century the only Catholic Church on the island. These outings were outlets for all types of emotion, including conflict, sometimes escalating into violence (Euwens 1932:124).

Both enslaved people and manumitted former slaves would seize the main events in life - births, baptisms marriage and death - as an opportunity to come together, reinforcing bonds and expressing their religious beliefs. The rites of passage performed on these occasions emphasized their importance to the Afro-Curaçaoans.

Deaths and funerals in particular, allowed for traditional practices to be conducted, along with the creation of new ones in an effort to deal with the conditions enslaved people found themselves in. G.B. Bosch, who in 1815-1827 lived as a vicar on the island, describes a crying ritual at a funeral (1985:124).

Music was a dominant feature of these events. Hillary Beckles states that music and dance, above all, constituted the bridge over the troubled waters that connected Africa-born persons and their creole progeny. The linkage of these cultural encounters, however, represented much more than the passionate pursuit of pleasure; they were encoded with noises of spiritual liberation and invoked the voices of cosmological redemption. Dances, as these musical parties were called, embraced persons other than those gathered for a fun-filled time, they also provided masks for enslaved people to share opinions on the issues of the day (Beckles 2002:223-4).

Very often western visitors referred to drumming, singing and dancing when writing of their experiences on the island.⁷⁷ Teenstra (1977), who travelled in the Dutch West Indies in 1828-1829 and in 1833-1834, wrote that both coloureds and blacks would sing at the funeral of a family member, just as in Suriname. A document written in 1765 indeed mentions the drumming of a group of black people during the wake of a child (Klooster 1999:507). Social conduct at these events was not always accepted by those in power and

harsh measures were often taken. Laws were introduced to regulate behaviour at funerals. For example, during one period it was stipulated that no more than six people could attend a funeral and that they must return to their homes immediately after the service (de Smidt and Schiltkamp 1978:102-3, 137-8, 208).

These regulations had to be repeatedly enforced. Social gatherings were much more than merely the reinforcement of social cohesion: they were the manifestation of a sense of spirituality. They show how Afro-Curaçaoans perceived and experienced themselves in the world. For example: rather than a departure, death was considered a transition to a new status, that of the ancestors, (*avochi*), who remain connected with the living.⁷⁸

Work songs grabbed the attention, as earlier documents reveal. The aforementioned Bosch (1985:200-1) wrote that the enslaved people sang work songs while they were building his lime kiln. Bosch showed the multifunctional aspect of singing, which besides providing entertainment, was meant to enhance group solidarity and participation. Another author, named Abbring, stressed the profound nature of music in Afro-Curaçaoan society. He was amazed that enslaved people could still be singing songs, considering their tragic plight (1834:50).⁷⁹ Abbring showed some sensitivity to the slaves and underlined the function and the importance of songs, dance and poetry in making their lives more bearable.⁸⁰

Life of the Free Black Population

In the nineteenth century the free coloured population continued to grow. The number of manumissions increased particularly after 1850, when they were made free of cost (Renkema 1981a:120). Over time the growth of this category contributed to greater societal complexity. Scholars have long recognized that in order to understand slavery as an institution, and the status of free people of colour within slave society, it is necessary to gain a better insight into the potential for - as well as the rate of incidence of - manumission. Manumission was based on the interplay of psychological, socio-demographic, geographic, economic, chronological, individual and family factors. No single factor in isolation could determine the greater or lesser frequency of manumission (Russell-Wood 1982:31).

On Curaçao it was a frequent event that enslaved people were able to purchase their freedom through hard work. Skilled artisan slaves in particular were likely to have this opportunity. The elite viewed them as 'geldzoekers' (money-seekers). Enslaved people would usually be hired out to do specific work; a fixed amount of the fee went to the shons (Römer 1980:25; Renkema 1981a:132). Urban enslaved people particularly, were hired out and in this way earned some money for themselves. The question remains as to what extent they were able to prosper once they had purchased their freedom. The fact that some young slaves (who had inherited their slave status from their mothers) were later manumitted by their already freed fathers, may be an indication of a degree of financial well-being among this group (Goslinga 1956:111).

In addition, some masters freed their slaves as an act of humanitarianism. They would sometimes also provide them with a piece of land.⁸¹ Some of these slaves, to whom property was left, had either blood or sexual ties with their master. Documents show that over the years these pieces of land were passed on to descendants as family land.

The nature of manumission was closely related to the economics of plantation life. The least productive slaves, the crippled and the old, were the worst off. When they were also granted freedom, generally this went without any form of support, especially in adverse economic situations (van der Lee 1998:2). The masters were not forced by law to support their manumitted former slaves, as was the case in the British Caribbean. Thus manumission did not necessarily imply opportunity and benefit for everyone. Mainly for the elderly and handicapped it would mean destitution. After 1863 these groups experienced difficult times living on their own and having to provide for themselves. They would receive government aid in the order of fifty or sixty cents per month. Circa two hundred persons received this aid. At first the money was paid out to their former owners, who provided them with food and clothing. Afterwards the district master paid them directly (Langenfeld 2005).

Of the total freed population, the proportion of people of mixed race was relatively high, as it was usual for the illegitimate offspring of the slave-masters to be granted manumission by their white fathers. Some scholars consider the sexual relationships between black slave women and their white owners, resulting in coloured people, as the ultimate expression of the slave-master's power over the lives of his slaves. Yet, according to Mintz and Price (1976:76), these relationships are among the most complicated issues in African-American history, as they went against the ideal of strict racial separation. This situation did have some compensating factors for the slave women involved. Being the mistress of a slave-owner brought along material and social benefits. The coloured offspring could also acquire wealth and power in addition to manumission. Hence, the social hierarchy of enslaved, like that of free people, was whiter at the top than at the bottom (Berlin and Morgan 1993:2). On Curaçao this social advantage gained by a female slave cohabiting with a European male, was valued and expressed in the term *drecha rasa*: 'to improve the race'.

Among the freed population on the island there were more women than men (Renkema 1981a:28, 72). The Table below demonstrates this.

Table 3.4 Manumitted Slaves 1820, 1830, 1840

	Male	Female	Boy	Girl	Total
1-1-1820	877	2,047	1,160	1,111	5,195
1-1-1830	1,063	2,166	1,200	1,392	5,821
1-1-1840	1,166	2,190	1,492	1,584	6,432

Source: Renkema 1981a:338

Curaçao stood out among other Caribbean societies for its comparatively large free coloured population. The social position of the freedpeople varied. Some coloureds became prosperous. Some, mostly the offspring of Jewish slave-owners, were able to integrate into a higher social level, especially in the field of commerce (Hoetink 1958:81; Römer 1979:44; Rupert 1999:74). Others had the opportunity to become land owners or even owned slaves themselves (Renkema 1981a:96). In 1819 a private school opened, led by a mulatto (Römer 1992:38).

Coloured women in particular formed a large part of the manumitted (Klooster 1999). The following example shows that they were also able to transcend certain limits. Maria Manuela, alias Leyba, petitioned the government in 1862 to change her name to Leyba as she was the illegitimate daughter of a man named Leyba. She was manumitted in 1850, at the age of 35. Nine years after being freed, she was able to buy a slave and a few years later a second one.⁸²

In general, the attitude of white society toward freedpeople of colour was ambiguous. On the one hand they were used as a counterweight to the slave population by placing them in the battalions of free mulattoes and blacks, to help suppress rebellions. On the other hand they were often considered to be rebellious and lazy, and lacking in respect for the white ruling class. It seems that as the number of freed black and coloured people increased, the more racially conscious white society became. In 1818, governor Kikkert even considered sending freedpeople to Suriname (Renkema 1981a:146).

The freed coloureds were prevented from attaining certain public offices. James Agnes Jones, a highly articulate manumitted coloured merchant - who spoke several languages - was presented in 1854 as a candidate for an official function by the acting governor who had recently arrived from the Netherlands. However, Jones was pressured to decline the offer due to his colour (Sjiem Fat 1986:81). Some opposed these discriminatory practices and fought for their civil rights, as was the case of the former slave called Joseph Kogen, manumitted in 1833 at the age of 33, who was denied the possibility of being elected a member of the juridical tribunal.⁸³

Freed Curaçaoans were confronted with the basic problem of how to participate economically and socially in society. At the final stages of slavery, priests such as Niewindt and Putman painted a very bleak picture of the social situation of the freed. Niewindt wrote in his letters how he saw freedpeople suffering from hunger, lack of proper housing, clothing and medical treatment, and sometimes both the freed and the enslaved ended their lives lying by the side of the road (Goslinga 1956:111).

What possibilities lay open for the freed to adapt to their new situation? What chance did they have of gaining a livelihood? The first option was agriculture. This was, however, severely hindered by the island's geology and climate. Their subsistence through agriculture was also made difficult by the fact that by the mid-eighteenth century large part of the fertile land was already given over to plantations (Renkema 1981a:17-8). The freed were thus limited to using public ground, the so-called *sabana*. There, a large number built their houses and used the land for producing crops such as maize, beans and squashes. However, this land was mostly infertile and on these pieces the land owners were permitted to graze their live stock. Their animals would eat the crops of the inhabitants. Although several regulations prohibited this practice (de Smidt and Schiltkamp 1978:270) - this was once again mentioned in the Regulation of 1849 as a problem for the freed - it would continue until the twentieth century. Thus sometimes legal measures may in themselves not have been discriminatory, but their enforcement often was. In the same year the government gave amnesty to those who had illegally built their homes on the *sabana*, but it would act against any future illegal developments.⁸⁴ The freed were allowed to keep goats, donkeys and pigs; their number being regulated by law.

Some freed blacks engaged in the trading of food-crops, so that portions of the subsistence production were transported to town and sold in the marketplace. This could only be done in accordance with the regulations. For other forms of subsistence, such as hunting and sometimes fishing, permission was required from the plantation owners (Kunst 1981:212). During slavery fishing was hindered by laws aimed at preventing slaves from seizing fishing canoes to escape from the island (Kunst 1981; de Smidt and Schiltkamp 1978). During the last years before emancipation, the number of enslaved people using stolen boats to escape increased considerably, despite several regulations obligating the owners to ensure that their boats could not be taken away. Moreover, fishermen had to obtain special fishing passes, which they had to renew every three months, at the costs of three cents per pass. These were shown to the head guards when they went fishing.

Sometimes fishing was combined with agriculture. While workers were moving from one activity to the other - dictated by the weather or the season - women tended to the tasks of agricultural production during the period when this was required. Fresh fish was sold by female peddlers in town, or they smoked and dried the fish in order to make it last longer. Sometimes turtles would be caught at the Islas Los Roques or the Islas d'Aves (Bosch 1985:146), which provided an additional income. Their prices were even regulated by law.⁸⁵ Even though the work was tedious, fishing offered higher returns than agriculture. Different fishing villages were founded, such as Westpunt and Boca Sami. Westpunt became a large community, with a church being built in 1849.

Qualified artisans could gain a livelihood by working as carpenters, masons, shoemakers and tailors. There were also prospects within commerce and the shipping-industry, which were well developed on the island. Men became sailors or dockyard workers.⁸⁶ Unfortunately, no statistical data are available regarding the number of people who made a living from these types of work in the beginning of the nineteenth century (Renkema 1981a:15). Women also worked as wet-nurses. I encountered a contract dated 16 January 1852 in which a manumitted woman agreed to breastfeed a babygirl in exchange for food and clothing for her and her daughter. She would receive the salary of two guilders per month at the end of the two-year period.⁸⁷ These women were usually called *menchi*.

Sometimes people would leave the island in times of economic adversity, to seek a livelihood elsewhere. Yet manumitted former slaves were still restricted in their mobility due to the Law of 10 May 1837, stipulating that if they wanted to leave the colony before their first manumitted year had ended, they should apply for a special permit from the State.⁸⁸

A Roman Catholic priest, when interviewed in 1853 by the Commission preparing for emancipation, stated that people would emigrate as a survival strategy. People travelled the region in search of work, relocating to countries such as Venezuela and Puerto Rico. These creoles from Curaçao, as they were called in Puerto Rico, were mentioned as a separate group in the 1849 publication on Puerto Rican customs *El Gibara* by Manuel Alonso (Quintero-Rivera 1994:27). Putman stated in his interview before the Commission that in St. Thomas - at the time a Danish colony - there was a street where freedpeople from Curaçao were living and where one could hear only Papiamentu being spoken (Commissie 1856:297).

As males migrated, women had to manage their own families' lives to survive their extremely poor conditions. They themselves would then farm their land or do other types

of work, such as weaving straw hats. During the 1850s women, and especially children, would weave straw hats and cigar cases for a living. The raw material was imported from the Spanish mainland and from Cuba (Renkema 1981b; van Dissel 1868). The hats were known as *Panama hats* and were exported to the United States.⁸⁹ This was an income for freedwomen living in the countryside rather than in town. According to A.W. Sythoff, 'if it was not for the making of hats, people would be in want' (1857:112-3).

Some enslaved women managed to migrate. Curaçaoan women often left to work as cooks or nannies employed by higher class Curaçaoan families, who themselves left the island in times of economic malaise (Hoetink 1982:33). For example, in a contract of 1852, Dominga Hypolite Fedelle committed herself to work as a wet-nurse, nurse-maid and domestic servant wherever her employer went.⁹⁰ Kinship relations were another decisive factor for emigration. For instance, two months after having been freed in 1862, a woman called Maria Ignes asked the colonial government permission to leave the island with her two mature sons for Puerto Rico, in order to join family members who were already living there.⁹¹ Family reunification was thus an important motive for leaving and liberation was used to re-establish kinship ties - wherever they might be.

The Roman Catholic Church's Mission

The nineteenth century sees increasing attempts to convert Afro-Curaçaoans to Catholicism. The Roman Catholic Church gradually convinced the colonial government of the importance of educating the enslaved. In that way the Church played a primary role in the dynamics surrounding the cultural encounters between enslaved, freedpeople and the free on the island. Their lives were thus influenced not only by the white elite, but also by the Roman Catholic Church, which became an important mechanism of cultural control (Lampe 1988; Allen 1988).

There is some evidence that enslaved people were baptized in the Christian faith before departing from Africa (Martinus 1997:127). The evangelization of the enslaved became more intense in the nineteenth century. At first the Dutch colonial government did not concern itself with this issue (Oostindie 1995a:53, 136). It is stated that from 1700 until 1824 the Church had little influence on the island, due to measures curbing religious practice, such as the admission of only one priest on the island at a time, the existence of only one church where people could be baptized and hear the gospel, the prohibited access on some plantations for priests, and - most importantly - the restrictions and laws imposed on the enslaved by the colonial government.

Even in these early times the Church did have some influence in the process of de-Africanization of the enslaved. Priests contributed, e.g. to changing names of the enslaved.⁹³ An article in *La Union* of 18 August 1971 mentioned that a priest named Michael Schabel living on the island in the eighteenth century had made sure that the enslaved did not receive what he called 'heathen names', in a bid to destroy paganism. Instead he chose from saints' names, a custom enduring until the beginning of the twentieth century.

The arrival of Niewindt in 1824 (who two decades would become the first vicar apostolic on Curaçao) marked the beginning of a new era in the history of christianization by

the Catholic Church on the island. Upon his arrival, Niewindt expressed concern for the enslaved. He denounced their poor living conditions and was able to enforce slave protection laws previously disregarded. With missionary zeal and in a dynamic manner, Niewindt applied himself to their conversion. Despite many difficulties he did for the most part succeed.

For Niewindt, conversion to Christianity entailed more than teaching the gospel. In his activities the term 'civilization' was a key concept. According to him the enslaved lacked civilization, which he saw as being at the core of all their evil practices. Unlike others, who at the time believed that blacks lacked all kind of civilization and were unable of changing, Niewindt's opinion was that their backwardness was not innate or genetic, but the result of their descent from Africa, where no civilization had ever existed. This inferiority meant that they needed to be educated and civilized. This encompassed certain virtues, such as diligence, discipline, neatness and monogamy. He stereotyped blacks as lazy, careless and lascivious, but added that through civilization this could change.⁹⁴

To Niewindt civilization represented more than only the refinement of behaviour. This he specified more clearly in his arguments to promote education among the enslaved and the freed. Apart from learning how to read and write, education involved learning the basics of the Roman Catholic religion in which they were baptized; it also addressed their obligations towards the government, their master and their fellowmen.⁹⁵ Even though until 1848 Niewindt's ideas about education did not antagonize the government, it was quite difficult for him to convey his ideas to the colonial administration. His state of readiness in religious matters, as manifested in the building of several Catholic churches on the island, did not leave the establishment unaware. They feared, as did others, that the large gathering of enslaved during church services would allow them to realize 'their collective strength' (Lampe 1988:104).

All of this would change after 1848, a turbulent year for the colonial government due to the unrest of enslaved people on the Dutch Windward Islands. Due to these problems a closer relationship grew between the State and the Church. The colonial government seemed to agree with Niewindt that educating the enslaved was an important device in maintaining peace on the island and in safeguarding the lives and the property of the other inhabitants. The State even began to pay the salaries of the priests (Goslinga 1956:130).

Moreover, the slave regulation of 1857 guaranteed religious education for the older people and general education for the young (Dahlhaus 1924:430).⁹⁶ There were opportunities for slave-children to attend schools founded by the Church. Sometimes the yearly reports mentioned complaints that very few of the enslaved and freed living in the countryside made use of this opportunity. One factor contributing to this was the practice of using child labour; due to this, slave-children were kept from going to school by their owners. Poverty was another factor keeping children from attending school, as they lacked proper clothing.⁹⁷

School was also an opportunity for slave-children to meet freed children, leading to a sense of cohesion.⁹⁸ In various schools the children of the enslaved were taught basic reading and writing skills, and above all catechism. Roman Catholic priests translated the Bible in the local language and used other methods for spreading the message. Putman had

several young children living in his house to who he taught the gospel (1941:53). Moreover, some people were payed by priests to educate slaves and others unable to attend church.⁹⁹

The clergy also addressed aspects of life which they felt were hindering Christianization. This was manifested, for example, in the fight against colonial laws preventing slaves from marrying. Slave-masters were opposed to formal marriage because this would not allow them to sell their slaves separately. Furthermore, marriage was seen as a consecration of the relationship between two human beings of different sexes; this was not an institution a slave was entitled to, since he was considered a material possession. Yet the Roman Catholic Church considered marriage an important mechanism towards civilization. The priest Stoppel openly voiced his concerns in this respect to the King of Holland in a letter in 1817. He even proposed legal changes by stating that enslaved people should be allowed to marry, that both civil and church marriages should be free of charge, and that married slaves should not be sold without their partner (Stoppel in Lampe 2001:137).

Niewindt would continue in this attempt and argue that marriage was essential, focusing on the benefit this institution would have for the slave-master:

*The attachment of the enslaved to his master will become larger when he knows that not only his life, but also that of his wife and children lies in the hand of the slave-master.*¹⁰⁰

In this respect the Roman Catholic Church was less successful. At various times slaves acted against this prohibition. However, they could consecrate their cohabitation in what was called a 'matrimonia clandestina': a slave couple would be married by a priest in a clandestine way; such a marriage was not legalized. Locally it was called *salta garoti*: 'jumping the cane'. Among slaves it was a valuable institution, and such a union was respected by the community.

In the process of christianization, the Roman Catholic Church fought hard to eradicate cultural practices it considered heathen and which it thought were remnants of an African past. In that sense the Church initiated a change in the behaviour of Afro-Curaçaoans. One of the customs it tried hard to eradicate was the previously mentioned *tambú* gathering. The Church became increasingly concerned with control and took an active role in the de-Africanization of Curaçaoans.

All of these methods were efforts to prepare the enslaved for freedom. Niewindt played a leading role in this and is still considered the emancipator of the enslaved people (Goslinga 1956; Rojer 1997). Amongst scholarly priests, however, there is a recent tendency towards a more critical view of Niewindt's role. Cees Streefkerk (1999) is less favourable in his judgement of the Catholic Church's position in the emancipation process and he questions whether Niewindt deserves to be called the emancipator of the slaves. Lampe (1988) had already opposed this view on Niewindt; he also focused on the contributions of the priest Putman - who in general receives very little attention.¹⁰¹

Conclusion

Afro-Curaçaoans did not form a homogeneous group. In assessing the characteristics of the Afro-Curaçaoan population it is clear that on arrival they were, and would continue to be, a diverse group, both in terms of social position and awareness. Oral history reveals the different ways in which this awareness was manifested. Race, skin colour and ethnicity became important determinants for distinguishing people.

The origin and dynamics of the slave trade, economic and political circumstances and social conditions - such as demographic circumstances - influenced the lives of enslaved people as cultural agents in society. Afro-Curaçaoans had a notion of certain ethnic and cultural practices from the African continent. This revealed itself for example in their songs and narratives, and in their naming of places on the island, which they passed on to the younger generations. However fragmented and vague these notions may have been, they demonstrated the continued claim to a geographically specific African descent. Oral history, in particular information collected from people born soon after emancipation, shed light on how people saw slavery at the time.

In their everyday lives, both as enslaved and as freedpeople, Afro-Curaçaoans had to deal with the reality of powerlessness. Much of their life took place within strict limits defined by the institutions of white society. Laws regulating their lives were made in the interest of the plantation owners. This manifests itself most clearly in the area of work, where the intervention of those with power was clearly present. Some enslaved lived under less stringent conditions, sometimes giving rise to a social bond between owners and enslaved ('bon shon'), whereas others lived under harsh conditions with little interaction with their masters. Oral history also reveals the hardships slaves encountered on plantations under the regime of a particularly 'mal shon'.

The growth of the freed coloured and black population added to the anxiety of plantation owners in particular. Over time the manumitted former slaves became a significant group. Their growing numbers, remarkable by Caribbean standards, put the resilience of Curaçaoan slave society to the test. Apart from social and racial discrimination, this 'free' group also suffered from material distress, resulting in malnutrition and poor health. The Roman Catholic Church did take initiatives to help them, adding at the same time a good dose of paternalism. This heralded the Church's role for the period after 1863, when full emancipation was accomplished.

Notes

- 1 De Smidt and Schiltkamp 1978:3-8; Gehring 1987:3-7. These instructions addressed the type of work both Indians and blacks ('swarten en swartinnen') should perform, their punishment if they should try to escape, and their treatment by the whites. It is interesting to note that even though blacks and Indians performed slave-work, their women were allowed to intermarry with white men. However, this could only happen if the women had been baptized as a Christian and if they had been instructed accordingly - and officially accepted as such. Thus, even though Indians and blacks were set apart as a group, at the time religion played a more determining role than race and colour.

- 2 Jordaen (1999:478). Undoubtedly slaves like elsewhere in the Caribbean were involved in gathering the prime materials for lime: conch, lime rich marine shells and island coral (Price 1966:1375).
- 3 Renkema 1981a:118.
- 4 Postma 1990. Terms such as 'Minase negers' (negroes embarked at Elmina) and 'Fidase negers' (negroes from Fida) were often mentioned in the case of Curaçao.
- 5 La Union, 18-8-1971. This article refers to the announcement of two slaves who fled in canoes. One was named Batista Vlaams and could speak the language of the land of Calabari in Africa. The author also refers to the Jesuit priest Dujardid, who learnt various African languages so that he could communicate with the people. The first written account in Papiamentu is a letter dated 5-10-1775 from a Curaçaoan Jew to his mistress.
- 6 This rather close collaboration with European slave-owners is at odds with the way Luango's are often represented in oral history. Luango (Angola) was an important state in Africa during the time of the slave trade. Geographically large and including a number of tributary states that exercised considerable internal control and that were bound by payments of tribute outside any administrative decree (Thornton 1998:xxvii).
- 7 Putman 1937-1941. Putman lived in the eastern part of the island.
- 8 According to McDaniel this differs from the West African myths, where only witches and spirits are able to fly. This ability could nevertheless also end once salt was eaten.
- 9 Interview C.M. Elizabeth (born 1897), Allen, 15-6-1989. (NatAr).
- 10 Idem.
- 11 Hence they were called work songs, *kantika di trabou*.
- 12 Interview Eduardo Tokaai (born 1899), Allen, 12-9-1984 (NatAr).
- 13 Interview Shon Tin (born 1886), Brenneker/Juliana, 1959 (Zikinzá-collection, T 854, NatAr).
- 14 McDaniel 1990:29 (translation by Frank Martinus.)
- 15 See Chapter 2, 'Cross-Checking with the Brenneker/Juliana Collection'.
- 16 Interview Reini Laker (born 1887), Brenneker/Juliana, 1959 (Zikinzá-collection, T 1025, NatAr).
- 17 Unable to translate as it may be Guene.
- 18 This may have had to do with the fact that a canoe was required to go ashore.
- 19 Zikinzá-collection, T 416, NatAr. Brenneker transcribed 'nabiu' as 'navluta', while Martinus (1996:200) transcribed it as 'naviu'.
- 20 Its inhabitants called it Genni, the Arabs used to call it Ghenoa, while the Portuguese and other Europeans named it Ghinea.
- 21 Thornton (1998:xxii) states that Popo bordered on the Volta and on Allada.
- 22 This land belonged to Martina Bonnet, alias Martina Kongo (NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 4e district, 1863-1906, inv. no. 136, 25-9-1894/107). The piece of land is situated between Jan Boos and Weto. See also Werbata Map: a map put together by the topographer J.V.D. Werbata, who worked in 1906-1909 on Curaçao (Renkema 1981a:270).
- 23 Werbata Map. See La Union, 18-8-1971.
- 24 Oostindie 1997:12. An overview of the number of slaves on the Curaçaoan plantations shows that in 1735, of the 376 slave-masters, only 11 per cent owned more than ten slaves, while 73 per cent owned less than five. There was only one owner who had more than one hundred slaves. In 1764, 16 per cent of slave-owners had more than ten slaves, 66 per cent less than five. In 1863, 62 per cent had less than five slaves, 17.5 per cent more than ten. Eight owners had more than one hundred slaves. Most of the larger plantations on Curaçao were situated in Banda Bou. Slaves in the eastern part of the island (Banda Riba) were more accustomed to living together in small concentrations (Römer 1979:16-7)
- 25 Els Langenfeld, Project Porto Mari 2001.
- 26 NatAr, Publicatie Blad 1857,nr. 2.
- 27 Interview Simon Bonifacio (born 1907), Allen, 9-5-1989 and 16-5-1989 (NatAr). From his 18th until his 20th birthday he had worked on the salt-pans.

- 28 Klooster 1999:506. See Report Commissie 1856:257. Compare Oostindie 1997:32.
- 29 Announcements about escaped slaves would therefore indicate in which places they had fled and their assumed new places of residence. Furthermore, when slave ships were confiscated by the Spanish government in Venezuela, they would sell all their belongings, including the slaves.
- 30 'Creole' refers to being born on the island, not to race (mixing). Thus it could also refer to a white person born on the island. Menkman 1935:80.
- 31 The way in which the white population perceived blacks is reflected in the words they used to describe them as a group. Increasingly they were set apart, indicated as 'neger' ('negro'). The terms 'piecas de Indias' and 'macarons' clearly show how the black race was seen as a commodity.
- 32 Interview Lucia Wederfoort (no age registered), Brenneker/Juliana, no date (Zikinzá-collection, T 529, NatAr). 'Cornea bam kunuku/bam kunuku bam kunuku/kornea bam kunuku/bam bebe lechi/bam bebe lechi di porku pretu' (Cornea come and drink the milk of a black pig).
- 33 *La Union*, 18-8-1971. Until the present day the term 'pretu mahos' (black and ugly) is used and certain hair types are labelled good or bad. Expressions such as 'mal òf bon kabei' (good or bad hair) are still common.
- 34 This song was collected by Brenneker and Juliana and sung by Pedro Clemencia (age unknown). Stored at the Public Library.
- 35 Juliana 1963:14, 42. In an interview, dated 11-10-1983, Machinet Sluis (born 1900) used these proverbs to demonstrate why, according to her, whites and blacks should keep themselves to themselves. NatAr.
- 36 Interview Nicolaas Petrona (born 1898 in Kent U Zelf, eastern part of the island), Allen, 1986 (NatAr).
- 37 Interview Pa Allee (born 1899), Brenneker/Juliana, 1959 (Zikinzá-collection, T 906, NatAr).
- 38 Interview Eduardo Tokaai (born 1899), Allen, 12-9-1984 (NatAr).
- 39 *La Union*, 8 -9-1937.
- 40 Based on the plantation lists of 1862-1863 and on those of 1802 and 1819 (Renkema 1981a:128-30.)
- 41 The nature of the punishment handed out to slaves on Curaçao during the year 1859. Koloniaal Verslag 1860.
- 42 Interview Wawa Willems (born 1875), Brenneker/Juliana, 1960 (Zikinzá-collection, T 177, NatAr).
- 43 Interview Henriette Willems (born 1890), Brenneker/Juliana, 1959 (Zikinzá-collection, T 509, NatAr). She sang: 'mi t'ei Kenepa, bai mira e Santanas' (I am going to Knip to visit the devil.)
- 44 Interview shon Pa di Zegu (born 1899), Brenneker/Juliana, 14-2-1972 (T 24, Fundashon Biblioteka Públiko Kòrsou).
- 45 Interview Imelda Valerianus (born 1915), Allen, 27-8-1995 (NatAr).
- 46 Literally: 'who took advantage of everything and left nothing behind for others.'
- 47 Interview Imelda Valerianus (born 1915), Allen, 27-8-1995 (NatAr).
- 48 English translation: 'Everything takes its time.'
- 49 For example, in 1857 fourteen complaints were registered by enslaved. No action was taken, however, due to lack of proof (Verslag over het beheer en de staat der West-Indische bezittingen en van die der kust van Guinea over 1857. Koloniaal Verslag 1857, zitting 1859-1860).
- 50 In a conversation with Lucille Berry-Haseth, knowledgeable about the Papiamentu language, she stated that the word 'salbèchi' might be derived from the word 'savage'.
- 51 Staat van straffen van maart tot ultimo december 1857 door de politie aan slaven opgelegd. In: KV 1857, zitting 1859-1860.
- 52 Interview Leoncito Blindeborg (born 31-10-1906), Brenneker/Juliana, 24-2-1972 (T 25, Fundashon Biblioteka Públiko Kòrsou).
- 53 Interview Shon Pa di Zegu (born 1899), Brenneker/Juliana, 14-2-1972 (T 24, Fundashon Biblioteka Públiko Kòrsou). The stealing of a piece of canvas was cited as a motive for giving Theodor-

- us, a 25 year old slave, three months of hard labour. Staat van straffen opgelegd aan slaven op Curaçao gedurende het jaar 1860. In: KV 1860, zitting 1862-1863.
- 54 The enslaved taken there would never return.
- 55 Interview Leoncito Blindeborg (born 31-10-1906), Brenneker/Juliana, 24-2-1972 (T 25, Fundashon Biblioteka Públiko Kòrsou).
- 56 Interview Henriqueta Garcia (born 1898), Brenneker/Juliana (T 75, Fundashon Biblioteka Públiko Kòrsou).
- 57 Interview Celestino M. Elizabeth (born 1897), Allen, 15-6-1989 (NatAr).
- 58 Interview Isabel Valks (born 1906), Allen, 13-3-1984 (NatAr).
- 59 Goslinga (1956) and Rutten(1989) considered the nutritional aspects of the slave food very poor, while Lamur (1981:87-102) mentioned the 'highly nutritional food' as one of the factors leading to the high fertility rate of enslaved on the island.
- 60 NA, Ministerie van Koloniën, 1850-1900, inv. no. 6738, 2-3-1863/138. These were motives given by H. Moran when he applied for a permit for the importation of a steam driven maize mill.
- 61 Register van de door de Politie gestrafte slaven, 1857. Koloniaal Verslag 1857, zitting 1859-1860.
- 62 Berlin and Morgan 1993; Blassingame 1975.
- 63 NatAr, Publicatie Blad 1820, nr. 31.
- 64 Niewindt stated in his report of 31 March 1828 to the Commissioner General J. van den Bosch that on some plantations enslaved were forced to work on Sunday (Dahlhaus 1924:90-4).
- 65 Interview Henriët Willems (born 1890), Brenneker/Juliana, 1959 (Zikinzá-collection, T 511 NatAr).
- 66 Interview John Godden (born 1876), Brenneker/Juliana, 1959 (Zikinzá-collection, T 667, NatAr).
- 67 This song refers to the bird revealing that people on the other plantations had already had their break.
- 68 Interview Pa Allee (born 1899), Brenneker/Juliana, 1959 (Zikinzá-collection, T 1256, NatAr). Pa Allee's parents lived on the plantation of Sabaneta situated in the western part of the island.
- 69 His statement was based on data from Haiti, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Dominica, Barbados, Jamaica and St. Kitts.
- 70 Staat van straffen opgelegd aan slaven van Curaçao gedurende het jaar 1861. In: KITLV, Koloniaal Verslagen 1861, zitting 1863-1864.
- 71 Staat van straffen van maart tot ultimo december 1857 door de politie aan slaven opgelegd. In: ITLV, Koloniaal Verslagen 1857, zitting 1859-1860.
- 72 Interview Pa Cai Maduro (born 1870), Brenneker/Juliana, 1958 (Zikinzá-collection, T 487, NatAr); interview Matias Bertinus (born 1899), Brenneker/Juliana, 1959 (Zikinzá-collection, T 624, NatAr); interview Nicolaas (Shon Cola) Susanna (born 1915), Allen, 1984 (NatAr).
- 73 'Yangadó' literally means waggling, but might here be used for someone who walks with pride, referring to the bomba who punished people. The meaning of 'tera abou' here is unclear.
- 74 Interview Hulia Isberto (born 1881), Brenneker/Juliana, 1959 (Zikinzá-collection, T 560, NatAr).
- 75 Interview Gertruda (Ma Tuda, born 1883), Allen, August 1983 (NatAr).
- 76 For long, the older generation used the period of slavery as an important marker of time. It was referred to as *tem' di katibu*.
- 77 Roberts (1998:xxvi) states that a main characteristic of traditional African music is that it is interconnected with daily living. Music serves a purpose and has a social use.
- 78 Music and singing served several functions among Afro-Curaçaoans. Mosley (2003:23) argues, in accordance with Gilroy (1993:74), that music has been the exemplary mode of communication in the black Atlantic world throughout the period of slavery, as the Africans came from diverse language and cultural groups and there was no common spoken language available.
- 79 The author lived and worked for ten years on the island. He was shocked one day to see a slave walking in front of him half naked with a heavy bunch of twigs on his head.

- 80 As late as the twentieth century, work songs were considered very important by the employers. According to an interviewee who knew a large number by heart, he was paid to be lead singer and so set the pace of the work by calling out the lines of verses, which were responded to by his co-workers. He improvised lyrics to include events and news affecting the community at that time. Following an injury due to an accident he was not dismissed – as was commonly done in that period – but kept at work in order to continue his singing. Through singing Afro-Curaçaoans could maintain and reinforce their religious beliefs and values. In their songs they expressed notions regarding communal life, pregnancy, birth, death etc.
- 81 See for example, NA, Ministerie van Koloniën, 1850-1900, inv. no. 6729, 27-9-1854/599.
- 82 NA, Ministerie van Koloniën, 1850-1900, inv. no. 6734, 5-12-1862/831. See also van der Lee (1998:596), stating her manumission date. Roset (Maria Manuela alias Roset, the daughter of Aldersina, belonging to the owner C.O. Leyba).
- 83 Staatscommissie 1856:247. The former governor referred to Kogen with much disdain in his interview with the Commission. See also van der Lee 1998:373.
- 84 NatAr, Publikatie Blad 1849, nr.228.
- 85 NatAr, Publicatie Blad,1829
- 86 KILV, Koloniale Verslagen, 1845 en Koloniale Verslagen, 1848).
- 87 NatAr, Notariële archieven (Curaçao), Notariële protocollen 1846-1854, inv. no. 19, 16-1-1852,15.
- 88 NatAr, Publicatie Blad 1837 nr. 201.
- 89 KITLV, Koloniale Verslagen 1853.
- 90 NatAr, Notariële archieven (Curaçao), Notariële protocollen 1846-1854, inv. no. 19, 13-2-1852,41.
- 91 NA, Ministerie van Koloniën, 1850-1900, inv. no. 6734, 15-10-1862/701. Being a former slave wanting to leave the country within one year after her manumission, she had to ask permission to leave. Clearly children remained with their parents despite being adults.
- 92 Patterson (1982) compared slavery to social death. One of his arguments was precisely the inability of enslaved Africans to retain their original names. See also Burton 1999:35-58.
- 93 Father Michael Schabel, born in 1662, was a bohemian Jesuit (Streefkerk 1995:159).
- 94 See Niewindt's report, 31-3-1828 (Dahlhaus 1924:119-20); letter Niewindt to the Bishop of Curicu, 8-1-1850 (Dahlhaus 1924:438-442;444-447).
- 95 Letter Niewindt to the Minister of Colonial Affairs, 14-11-1834 (Dahlhaus 1924:419-420) .
- 96 Letter Niewindt to the Minister of Colonial Affairs, 17-7-1848 (Dahlhaus 1924:428-433).
- 97 KITLV, Koloniale Verslagen 1854, 1856; Staatscommissie 1856:278.
- 98 KITLV, Koloniaal Verslag 1855.
- 99 KITLV, Koloniale Verslagen 1855.
- 100 Niewindt (8-1-1850) in Dahlhaus 1924:438-442;444-447.
- 101 Allen 1992a focuses on the Church's civilizing mission as a strategy to mould the personality of the enslaved and to make them more accepting of their plight. To the Church, a predominant factor in educational and social activities for the poor, social control was synonymous with civilization.

CHAPTER IV

Celebrating Freedom: The Abolition of Slavery on Curaçao

Introduction

On 8 August 1862 the so-called Emancipation law was passed. The enslaved in the Dutch colonies would become free on 1 July 1863. Accordingly, the 67 government- slaves and 6,958 private slaves on Curaçao gained their freedom on this date (*Lantèrnu* 2003:17). The proclamation was read out in Papiamentu in every Roman Catholic Church on the island. Events were held to celebrate freedom; people played music and danced; there were processions in the streets. These activities had already begun on 30 June 1863 and would continue for some days (*Lantèrnu* 2003:21). In his report on the celebration of Emancipation day on the island, governor Johannes D. Crol stated that ‘everything remained within the bounds of decency. The recently freed behaved orderly and quietly and in that way their behaviour left nothing to be desired’ (quoted in van Dissel 1868:512). In emphasizing ‘decency, order and good conduct’ among the recently freed, the governor attempted to correct some of the apprehensions existing about Afro-Curaçaoans.

Why did Crol need to concern himself with denying any kind of bad behaviour on the part of the freedpeople? What was the reality surrounding this event? Was emancipation an exuberant celebration of freedom or merely a calendar event? What exactly did freedom represent and how would this affect the former slave-owners?

The enslaved on Curaçao became free 29 years after emancipation in the British colonies and 15 years later than those in the French colonies. As a consequence of the abolition of slavery in neighbouring societies, slaves both in Suriname and on the Antillean islands had become increasingly restless and had begun to voice their dissatisfaction. Escaping slaves from the three Windward Islands could make for the nearby British islands, where they became free citizens. When the slaves in the French part of St. Martin received their freedom in 1848, their Dutch counterparts on the island strongly protested against their continued enslavement. The already impoverished slave-masters, along with the colonial government, had little option but to relent and also give slaves in the Dutch section their *de facto* freedom, albeit with the proviso that they remained in the employment of their former masters, being paid a small salary (Römer 1990:48).

These regional events would provoke increasing uneasiness amongst the enslaved, which necessarily affected the situation on Curaçao. Such occurrences finally led the colonial government to realize that emancipation could no longer be postponed. At the same time, members of the ruling class began to consider the ramifications of this large group

being introduced to free society. What would this entail for those already freed at an earlier stage, for the former slave-owners and for the newly freed themselves?

There was less debate on the islands than in Suriname, where there was fervent lobbying by the sugar planters in particular (Oostindie 1995b:153). Most of the discussions on the islands focused on financial matters, particularly the amount of compensation slave-owners would receive from the government once freedom was granted (Oostindie 1997:56-77). Besides these economic factors, concern focused on the social conduct of the soon to be freed slaves.

These debates fall under what Eudell (2002) has labelled 'political language'. Human beings understand their social realities and legitimize their ways of life by means of their language, which is never neutral, as it invokes values, summarizes information and suppresses the inconvenient. 'Political language then, is one in the sense of idioms, rhetoric, specialized vocabularies and grammars, modes of discourse and ways of talking about politics, created, diffused and employed in specific circumstances by former slaves, former slave-masters and government officials' (2002:10).

In the context of slavery, political language was used to legitimize enslavement in an intellectual manner. Therefore it was not solely a system of social inequality, but one upheld by a cultural system with its specific conceptions of activities, its concepts and language (Eudell 2002:8-9). Freedom also carries its own conception; the political language employed in the context of freedom – as opposed to enslavement – embodies certain norms and values. In understanding post-emancipation life this cultural dimension to the issue of freedom should be taken into account.

In these debates and discussions on the abolition of slavery on Curaçao, the concept of freedom is circumscribed by paradigms of values and ideas by which the ruling class claimed and reasserted its authority, based on how society was instituted during slavery. These ideas mapped the social position former slaves would occupy in society. Indirectly, they reflected the perception of what direction Curaçaoan society should take after emancipation. Former slave-owners and government officials used their weight within formal institutions to express their political views on freedom.

Yet, former slaves also possessed a whole complex of attitudes, values, self-images and notions of their rights, which they brought to the fore. Naturally, the experience of slavery influenced their interpretation of what freedom meant. In that way they countered the perception of freedom of those of the dominant class. In this Chapter I will describe how Emancipation day on Curaçao was celebrated. I will use a selection of songs which give insight into the ways in which former slaves and owners viewed freedom.

Gradual versus Immediate Freedom

Oostindie (1995a) contains a series of articles which try to explain that the emancipation of slaves in the Dutch territories was not primarily driven by economics. Essentially the book argues against the link between capitalism and the anti-slavery movement made by Eric Williams (1944). This link falls short, certainly when applied to the Dutch model. At the time of abolition in the Dutch territories, the Netherlands were experiencing strong

financial growth within a capitalistic free market system. Drescher (1995:25-67) compares the diverse ways in which the anti-slavery movements evolved in the various European metropolises. He concludes that these were not only induced by economic factors, but increasingly by a growing social awareness regarding new forms of social conduct and roles, individual rights and citizenship regardless of race.

The relatively late timing of emancipation is not due to economic factors in the Dutch West Indies, argues Oostindie. He states that on the one hand, the Dutch public simply did not care for or knew much about these colonies considered insignificant in comparison to the Dutch East Indies. Both the West Indies and slavery itself were hardly a matter of public debate. The major economic factor in delaying abolition was the Dutch treasury's lack of available funds to pay for indemnification of the slave-owners. In the end, the funds were derived from the booming Javanese economy. Exploited East Indian labourers paid for the emancipation of enslaved West Indians.

Wide cultural distances characterized the Dutch colonial empire. This certainly applied to the Caribbean islands, where the tongue of their colonizers was marginal, unlike in other Caribbean societies. In Curaçao, Papiamentu was the lingua franca. Dutch hardly mattered. What little Dutch influence there was on the island stemmed principally from the Church, as colonial government tended to be a regime very much in the background (Oostindie 1995b:161-7). Oostindie goes on to demonstrate how the various discussions taking place in anticipation of freedom placed emphasis on the requirement that the Afro-population demonstrate decent and orderly conduct.

An important document which allows us to gain access to political language at that time is the report by the State Commission installed in 1853 by the Dutch government in order to prepare for emancipation. This report (Staatscommissie 1856) contains letters from citizens who were concerned with the plight of the enslaved following emancipation. Furthermore, it contains interviews with people considered knowledgeable on island issues, having held important positions within society and having lived on the islands for a long period. On Curaçao interviews were held with three persons: a former governor, a priest and a businessman. The interviewees were told about the social and economic conditions of the enslaved and freed before emancipation. The report also reveals ideas held by the dominant class regarding Afro-Curaçaoans, both the freed and the enslaved.

There was some doubt as to whether the enslaved were ready for freedom. When asked by the Commission whether this was the case, the answers diverged. The former governor I.J. Rammelman Elsevier considered them ready; he was of the opinion that any postponement would have adverse effects (Staatscommissie 1856:241). The businessman van der Meulen, however, did not think they were ready for immediate emancipation. He doubted whether they were capable of fending for themselves and painted a bleak picture of possible starvation (Staatscommissie 1856:264).

The fact that the members of the Commission asked the Catholic priest Putman the same question shows that they themselves were convinced that emancipation was inevitable – slaves were being freed throughout the region – and that soon society would consist of solely free citizens. The priest was asked how one should go about granting freedom to the Afro-Curaçaoans. Putman was adamantly advocating an immediate rather than

gradual introduction to freedom, as the latter option would involve years of transition in the form of apprenticeships or probation (Staatscommissie 1856:241).

If freedom was inevitable, a central question then became: what would this imply for Afro-Curaçaoans? Or, more specifically, would they be able to deal with their newly found freedom? Slave-owners expressed their fear that former slaves would be resentful. Insurrections against whites in other Caribbean societies demonstrated that this fear was not unfounded.¹ However, the overall belief at the time, which was constantly reiterated in reports, was that when compared to other slaves in the Americas, those on Curaçao were calmer, and hence would not act upon any resentment held against their former slave-owners. In 1857, six years before emancipation, van Dissel accentuated this aspect of the enslaved: 'The character of the enslaved is not so evil. In general they are quiet, submissive and peace loving' (1857:116-7).

Yet the ruling class was not optimistic about the way Afro-Curaçaoans would deal with freedom. This pessimism was also grounded on perceptions they held of the free coloured population. Indeed, in a report by the governor after emancipation, he observes a kind of behaviour pattern among the recently freed which he felt had always existed among the freed black population, namely the lack of responsibility in fulfilling their obligations (van Dissel 1868:513).

As we have seen, the number of blacks on Curaçao already free before the end of slavery was greater than the number still enslaved. This was at odds with the rest of the Caribbean. The dominant class, thus, was already accustomed to a large group of freed blacks in society. As was the case elsewhere, the legacies of slavery continued to burden this group as it struggled to integrate (Berlin and Morgan 1993:61). In the eyes of the dominant class, the freedpeople were less disciplined than the enslaved, whose behaviour was largely controlled by their owners. For some former slaves, the association between slavery and labour was so intimate that freedom literally meant idleness. They worked only when necessary and occasionally enriched their diet by stealing food. The vision of theft haunted the plantation owners, who used this as an argument against impending emancipation. For example, one plantation owner cited the theft of his animals by manumitted former slaves as a reason for requesting to fence his plantation. The government granted this request.²

The immediate question then became: how was it possible to regulate the social behaviour of an enlarged community of free citizens, as slave-owners would no longer have legal authority to exercise power over the activities and lives of these individuals? Two concepts dominated the discourse on this matter: 'morality' and 'civilization'. In the aforementioned report these words appeared in reflections on the character of the black popular class. Following emancipation, such statements would become even more outspoken. 'Blacks' should be civilized and be taught moral standards. They often were defined as immoral and anti-social, a population whose behaviour needed to be monitored and regulated. This raises the question as to what the ruling class deemed 'moral and civilized behaviour'. After all this would be the bench mark by which the behaviour of Afro-Curaçaoans would be judged.

Some were more specific about what they thought to be immoral and uncivilized conduct. They cited shortcomings such as lack of labour discipline, lack of work ethic, lack of a nuclear family life, and dishonest and disorderly behaviour (Oostindie 1995b:158-67).

The 'cultural agenda of reconstruction', as Eudell calls this phenomenon, entailed setting up a more detailed programme to teach the former slaves proper behaviour and new values, in doing so dispelling the old ones, connected to their African backgrounds and their culture of slavery (2002:17).

The Roman Catholic Church's Perception of Freedom

The letter written by vicar apostolic J.F.A. Kistemaker which was read out on Emancipation day, began by declaring that the day of freedom had arrived and that everyone would now be part of society as a free person. 'The sun that rises for you on the first of July, rises for the first time for the free.' Kistemaker underlined certain issues in his letter, such as work discipline, which he also affirmed as a religious activity. He associated laziness with sinful behaviour, punishable by the State, but above all by God.

Our government has also instituted a law aimed at people who do not want to work. Idleness is thus also an omission against the law. Consider work as an obligation imposed by God on the people. If you do not abide by the law, you will experience the consequences of free society, because poverty and misery will be your fate.³

Some behaviour patterns of the previously manumitted were held up as examples to be avoided by the newly freed. This principally concerned the custom of some freedpeople to work on Sundays and Christian holidays, making it impossible to attend mass. Often slaves had used the fact that they had to work on Sundays and holidays in order not to go to Church on Sundays. Kistemaker reminded them that this could no longer be the case. He paid particular attention to the issue of sexual morality and monogamy. Whilst summing up the characteristics of slavery, Kistemaker also mentioned that there was now no longer a law prohibiting marriage. He expanded on this issue and stated:

We expect that (...) as there is no longer a restriction on marriage, that you will end your promiscuous behaviour. We expect that with God's help, freedom will be a way to end this awful custom existing among a Christian population. We also trust that the government will facilitate the process of marriage.⁴

Clearly, this was a hint to the government to actively start promoting a change in behaviour.

Catholic missionaries also had a say in the way in which freedom was expressed. The following poem is one of the few preserved in written form from that time. It was part of Father Euwens' collection. The lyrics reveal the influence of the Roman Catholic Church; the poem was most probably ghost-written by a priest.⁵

Cancion di libertat

Roeman nan gradici ku Noos
 Pa cielo soe bondad
 Foor di toer bofoon noos tie é koos
 Noos tien noos libertat
 Awé na bolontad die Rey
 Y pa boos di noos nasjoon
 Pa noos tin dilanti die Ley
 Liber die toer sjoon
 Bam pidie Doos rodiá baauw
 Koe santoe debosjoon
 Su bindisjoon pe és bon trabaauw
 Hasi pa noos nasjoon
 Noos tata grandie goestoe y boon
 Y maas sabi koe noos
 Manda awe bo bindisjoon
 Pa toer boon jieuw die Dioos
 Den bida largo i salud
 Kontentoe motjoe koos
 Pa Rey, La Reyna i su jieuw
 Nos toer ta pidie Dioos
 Reconicido noos lo ta
 Pa doechi libertat
 Ma Dioos bo man so lo paga
 Y obra die bondad
 Sjoon nan adioos, na Dioos soe
 manoe
 Lo tien in (Noos ta sigoe)
 Amoor pa noos y bosonan
 Hoestichie pa noos toer
 Niengoen koe noos lo ta rabiá
 Oen pober poor ta boon
 Pa sabi keen ta fortoena
 Noos tien noos koerason
 Noos tien noos koerason
 Awe no tien kegamiento mas
 Ni manoe riba noos
 Noes toer ta jieuw stima di oen kaas
 Katiboe die Dioos
 Salud Dioos doechi pa trabaauw
 Contentoe koe noos Ley
 Y biba semper Corsouw
 Hoelanda y noos Rey
 Hulanda y noos Rey

Corsouw, 1 July 1863

Song of freedom

Brothers and sisters say thanks together with us
 For heaven's goodness
 Out of every mockery, we have the thing
 We have our freedom
 Today in willingness of the King
 and the voice of our nation
 We are in the eyes of the law
 Free from all owners
 Let us ask God on our knees
 With holy devotion
 His blessing for this good work
 Done to our nation
 Our great father just and good
 More knowledgeable than us
 Send today your blessing
 To all good children of God
 In long life and in health
 very glad
 For the King, Queen and her child
 We ask God
 Grateful we will be
 For the sweet freedom
 But only God will pay
 For this work of goodness
 Owners goodbye and from
 God's hand
 There will be (we are sure)
 Love for us and for you
 Justice for all of us
 None of us will be angry
 A poor person can be good
 To know who is fortunate
 We have our heart
 We have our heart
 Today there will be no complaint anymore
 No hands over us
 We are all children from one home
 Slaves of God
 Here is to sweet God for work
 Happy with our law
 And long live in Curaçao
 Holland and our King
 Holland and our King

Curaçao, 1 July 1863

The following song also conveys the strong influence of the Roman Catholic Church in the expression of freedom (*Lanternu* 2003:24). The author is unknown and the song was dedicated to governor Crol, who signed the proclamation of freedom in Dutch, English and Papiamentu. To a greater extent than the former song, it expresses a firm belief in labour, distinguishing sharply between free and forced labour. It also expresses that the newly freed should not harbour any ill-feeling towards their former owners.

*Awe ta dia di nos salvasjon
E dia tan sperá
Ban gradicie e grandie Sjon
Koe awoor ta goberna
Si! Nos ta mashaar gradicie
Na Rey di nos nasjon
Gradicie na Sjon Willem drie,
Jamaar Willem Bon!
Awoor si. Nos ta wyta klaa
Koe e ta Willem bon!
Na e a haya
E nombre di soe nasjon
I awoor tambe ta guierta koe nan
Nos toer, joe di akie,
Koe'n glas di likoor na kada man:
Biba, Biba Willem drie
Pa Willem, lo nos hasi orasjon
I pa soe joe nan toer
Lo nos pidi koe devosjon
Oen bida si saloer
I Reina lo nos no loebida
Ma pidi di nos korason
Koe Djoos done prosperidá
I oen bida di bendisjon
Tambe e estimaar nasjon,
E nashon di libertat,
Bendishone koe toer koos bon
O! Djoos di bondad!
I toer e sjon nan koe ta goberna
Na tera di Hoelanda,
Rekonosie na nan lo nos tá
Pe koos koe nan a mandá
Sjon grandi di Corasaauw
Djoos dona bo saloer
Na kompania di Mevraauw
I di bo joe nan toer
Ai, papja danki na nos Rey
Pe grandisimo bondad,
Di manda nos e dushi ley
E ley di libertat*

*Today is the day of our salvation
The most expected day
Let us thank the important shon
Who is ruling now
Yes! We are very grateful
To the King of our nation
Grateful to Mr William the Third,
Named William Good!
Now we clearly see
That he is William Good!
At the he got
The name of his nation
And now, he will shout with them
All of us, children of this place,
With a glass of liquor in each hand:
Long live William the Third
We will pray for William
And for all his children
We will ask with devotion
A healthy life
And we will not forget the Queen
But we ask with all our heart
That God give her prosperity
And a blessed life
Also for beloved nation,
The nation of freedom,
Bless it with all that is good
O! God of goodness!
And every ruler who governs
In the country of Holland,
We will be grateful to them
For the thing that they have sent
The governor of Curaçao
God bless you with health
In the company of mistress
And all your children
Oh, convey our thanks to the King
For the largest goodness,
For sending us the sweet law
The law of freedom*

*Ai, papja danki pa nos toer
 Ne grandie i bon Nashon;
 Ma, bo por hacie mehor, segoer
 Si ta hasier di korason.
 Ai, papja danki tambe pa nos,
 Na Sjon Ministernan.
 E sjon nan k'a kita e koos
 E marga di nos pan.
 Adios Sjon nan, Sjon nan Adjoos
 Adjoos di nos korason
 Nos ta kontentoe koe e koos
 Ma no a loebida nos Sjon
 Ai, tene nos na nos trabaauw
 Koe goesto lo nos trahá
 Traha pa toer Sjon di Corasaauw,
 Ma traha,... trabaauw hoestá
 Awe nos ta baljá i divertí
 Maajá tambe podisé
 Ma na semaan koe ta bini
 Trabaauw lo nos mesté
 Ma no trabaauw, trabaauw forsá
 Esai lo nos no tien
 Trabaauw di katibu a kabá
 I Esklabitoed tien fin
 Ban gradicie na Djoos awoor
 Koe kantieka di gratitoed
 El a kita di nos e dolor,
 E kadena d'esklabitoed
 Moestra tambe nos bienhetsjoor
 Koe nos mer'ce e bondad
 Koe nos mer'ce e grandie faboor
 Di haya nos libertat!
 I Roga tambe na nos Santoe Djoos
 Pe dona nos bon trabaauw
 I forsá pa pidi koe nos voos
 Saloer pa nos Corasaauw!
 Biba sjon Wimpie! Biba Hoelanda!
 Semper lo noos guierta
 M'awé guierta k'oen glas di bibida
 Biba Sjon Crol, Bibá!*

*Oh, express our gratitude
 To the great and good Nation;
 But, you can do it better, surely
 If you do it from the heart.
 Oh, convey our thanks also,
 To the masters ministers.
 The ones who had taken away the thing
 The bitterness of our bread.
 Goodbye owners, owners goodbye
 Goodbye from our heart
 We are happy with the thing
 But did not forget our owner
 Oh, keep us at our work
 We will gladly work
 Work for all the owners of Curaçao
 But work,... contract work
 Today we will dance and enjoy ourselves
 Maybe tomorrow also
 But the coming week
 We will need to work
 But not work, forced work
 That we will not have
 Slave-work has ended
 And slavery has an end
 Let us thank God now
 With songs of gratitude
 He has taken from us the pain,
 The chain of slavery
 Let's also show our benefactor
 That we deserve his goodness
 That we deserve his big favour
 Of getting our freedom!
 And beg also our Holy God
 To give all of us good work
 And strength to ask with our voice
 Health for our Curaçao!
 Long live shon Wimpie! Long live Holland!
 We will always shout
 But today we'll cheer with a glass of wine
 Long live governor Crol, long live!*

The following speech made by a man named Gerardus Vos on behalf of the recently freed also displays evidence of Roman Catholic influence (*Lantèrnu* 2003:25). In this speech slavery is equated with misery and adversity, while freedom is likened to prosperity and happiness. It thus tried to voice more than the previous poems, in the way that it triumphed freedom.

What a happy day we experience today, as we see for the first time, the governor participating in our insignificant midst, in celebration of this party for the people. Every African must be proud and record this day of freedom in his memory. It is the immortal William III, who delivered us from our state of misery and adversity to prosperity and happiness. Our ancestors went to their graves with laments, plunged into horrible darkness of melancholy, without hope, fatigued by tiredness and suffering as a result of slavery.

Once again King William III is credited with playing an important role in the abolition of slavery; thus the enslaved were called upon to be thankful to him. This was reiterated in the second part of the speech.

Should we not show a thousand times our thanks and our benediction to the honorable King, who took us from the disastrous state of slavery and elevated our status to honorable citizens? Don't we now live in a more glorious era than the one experienced by our ancestors? Who should we give tribute to and show our gratitude? To William, the greatest! To the friend of humanity, who equals God with his deeds.

The Freedpeople's Perception of Freedom

How did the enslaved people perceive their newly gained freedom? When interviewed in 1853, the former governor Rammelman Elsevier talked about the need to form villages for the black population after emancipation. According to him, as a governor he did his utmost to persuade the freed population to go and live in the areas around churches, in order to establish villages, in which one could easily exercise police authority. He lamented that it was not possible to inspire the free black population to become active and attributed this to their ideas of freedom. He maintained that freedom meant for them the right to live where they wanted (Staatscommissie 1856:231-2). It is evident that the elite did not perceive freedom in the same way as the freed.

Even in the final days of slavery, some enslaved did not wait for emancipation. The large number of escapes during the last years of slavery demonstrates an ardent desire for freedom. These numbers were even higher than the official figures stated, as slave-owners did not always inform the authorities of slaves having escaped, fearing that they would receive less or even no compensation at the end of slavery.⁶ A population census for the control of finance conducted on 5 January 1857 on Curaçao indicates a disparity of 280 slaves, which was attributed to the fact that slave-owners had not registered the death or escapes of their slaves.⁷

Boats were commonly used to escape. During my research I met a woman born in 1886, whose enslaved grandmother and sister had fled to Carthagena, Columbia in a boat transporting dividivi;⁸ they were aided in their escape by the captain.⁹ The escape from the island as a manifestation of the general desire for freedom is also supported in information the governor received regarding slaves who had fled to Venezuela and St. Thomas. They had informed their masters that they had done so, not because they were treated

badly, but out of an urge to be free. But as they found themselves treated harshly in the places they had fled to, they would have liked to return to Curaçao, but feared punishment, so would rather go back at the time of emancipation – in doing so, making it possible for their masters to receive the compensation payable for each slave freed.¹⁰

As early as the 1850s rumours were circulating regarding the approach of freedom. The editor of the *Kerkelijke Courant* stated in 1862 that the enslaved had already been promised freedom circa ten years previously.¹¹ It is evident that slaves anticipated freedom well before 1863 and gradually became more and more anxious about the prospect. In a letter dated 31 October 1862, the Attorney General informed the district masters that some slaves from town were planning to thank the governor on the coming Sunday for the expected emancipation. The Attorney General feared that the plantation slaves would follow this example and therefore requested the district masters to tell them that emancipation would be due on the first of July the following year and they could thank them then.¹²

The question arises as to whether they sang the following song due to their discontent with waiting endlessly. A woman born in 1916, whose father's mother sang this song while doing her daily chores, remembered it. She explained that the enslaved felt taken advantage of by King William III, who presumably had promised them freedom, which again and again failed to materialize. In this song the role of William III in the abolition of slavery is not taken for granted. It expresses a feeling of anxiety due to the concern that freedom was being withheld.

Biba biba biba biba Wilmu Dèrdu
Biba biba biba biba Wilmu Dèrdu
Ma parse Wilmu Dèrdu
Bo tin idea di frega nos
Ma pa bo frega nos
*Bo bai frega bo mama.*¹³

Long live, long live William the Third
Long live, long live William the Third
But it seems William the Third
You are thinking of making a fool of us
But instead of making a fool of us
Go and fool your mother

The following variant of a similar song was collected by Juliana and Brenneker in the 1960s from Ma Djini, living in Otrobanda, who was born in 1869, six years after emancipation.

Ta ki ora Rei ta bini
Ki ora rei ta manda libertat
Rei ta pompa
Rei ta pompa
*Rei bai pompa rei su mama.*¹⁴

When is the King coming
When is the King sending freedom
The King is fooling
The King is fooling
The King should go fool his mother

The following song expressed a similar feeling and is intended as a demand:

Libertat, galité
La reina Viktoria
Manda e kos pa nos!
Libertat, galité
La reina Viktoria

Freedom, equality
Queen Victoria
Send the thing for us!
Freedom, equality
Queen Victoria

*Manda e kos pa nos!
 Libertat, galité
 Willem de derde
 Manda e kos pa nos!¹⁵*

*Send the thing for us!
 Freedom, equality
 William the Third
 Send the thing for us!*

And finally:

*Barku a bai, barku a bin
 Ta ki nobo Rei a manda?
 Ken k'a bini
 Nan a laga rei na soño.¹⁶*

*Ships come and ships go
 Is there any news from the King?
 Everyone who arrives
 (says) they left the King asleep*

This correlates with the following account, in which someone is accused of withholding emancipation. It reveals restlessness amongst the slaves as they await freedom. It also shows how the people in Banda Bou mythologized the previously mentioned bomba Ba Balentin, who was considered wicked. They attributed to him an important role in the delay of freedom.

Ba Balentin fitó, mester a pasa Sabaneta, Seiroma, Lagun i Kenepa. El a pasa Sabaneta sin duna libertat, pasó e tabata mal kontentu ku Lareina a kumpra tur kabes di katibu pa kuenta di 50 florin pa kabes. La reina¹⁷ a bisa ku e no ta kasa bou di bandera manchá pa krímen di sklabitut. Ba Balentin a duna libertat na Seiroma ku Lagun ku Kenepa. Seiroma ku Lagun ku Kenepa.¹⁸

Ba Balentin, the slave overseer, had to visit the plantations Sabaneta, Seiroma, Lagun and Kenepa. He called at Sabaneta without giving the slaves their freedom, because he was not satisfied that the Queen had bought the slaves for fifty guilders each. The Queen refused to marry under a flag blemished by the crime of slavery. Ba Balentin gave freedom to the slaves on the plantations Seiroma, Lagun and Kenepa.

Here it is not a royal figure responsible for the delay, but a wicked bomba, someone belonging to their own group presumably holding a grudge against the enslaved on a certain plantation. Indirectly, the bomba is recognized as having overall power.

In one of the above songs the name of Queen Victoria appears. Former slaves in the British colonies considered Queen Victoria as the person responsible for their freedom. In Jamaica this led her to be called 'Queen Free' (Lewin 1984:18). The informant could not give any explanation as to why Queen Victoria was mentioned.

She is mentioned once again in the lyrics of the following song. Martina Felipe, whom I interviewed in 1983, was born in 1893 and remembered her grandmother singing it.¹⁹ According to Martina Felipe, freedom was given to Curaçaoan slaves after people had denounced the atrocities of slavery to the authorities in Holland. This shows recognition of a power above that of the local colonial government. For some reason she assumed Queen Victoria to be the wife of William III.²⁰ Naming Queen Victoria in songs relating to freedom may be an indication that slaves on Curaçao were aware that their counterparts in the British colonies had long since gained freedom under the reign of Queen Victoria. It could be interpreted as a request to the Queen to free the slaves in the Dutch colonies in the same way. Hence the notion of a demand is manifested in the following song sung by

Martina Felipe:

<i>Libertat, egalité</i>	<i>Freedom, equality</i>
<i>La reina Viktoria</i>	<i>Queen Victoria</i>
<i>A manda e kos</i>	<i>Send the thing</i>
<i>La reina Viktoria</i>	<i>Queen Victoria</i>
<i>A manda e ko'</i>	<i>Send the thing</i>
<i>Libertat, galité</i>	<i>Freedom, equality</i>

The words 'libertat' and 'galité', derived from the French word 'égalité', a legacy of the French Revolution, were rekindled by the former slaves to express their joy of their newly found freedom. In a sense it reflects their understanding that freedom is an important condition for equality (Brenneker 1970:1770).²¹

<i>Awo' n'tin shon Henri,</i>	<i>Now there is no Master Henry anymore</i>
<i>n'tin shon de Palm</i>	<i>Neither Master de Palm</i>
<i>N'tin nada mas</i>	<i>There is nothing more</i>
<i>Awo' nos tur ta un</i>	<i>We are all one</i>
<i>Awo' nos tur ta un</i>	<i>We are all one</i>
<i>Awo' djaka lo laba tayó</i>	<i>Now rats will do the dishes</i>
<i>Awo' djaka lo frega kuchu</i>	<i>Now rats will clean the knives</i>
<i>Awo' djaka lo bari fogon</i>	<i>Now rats will sweep the oven</i>
<i>kaiman djuku, djuku kaiman</i> ²²	<i>No more submission, submission no more</i>

The embodiment of equality is clearly expressed in the last sentence 'kaiman djuku, djuku kaiman'. Martinus (1997), who analysed the Guene in relation to Caboverdian language, states that this sentence is equivalent to the Portuguese 'No mais yugo, yugo no mais', meaning no more submission.²³

In one of the songs on freedom sang by Ma Djini, this fact was again stressed.²⁴

<i>Awor ku katibu a kaba, n'tin katibu mas. Awor</i>	<i>Now that slavery has ended, there is no slavery</i>
<i>ku libertat a bini, awor mi no ta laba tayó.</i>	<i>anymore. Now that freedom has come, I won't</i>
<i>Awor ta djaka ta laba tayó (laughter).</i>	<i>wash any dishes anymore. Now rats will wash</i>
	<i>the dishes.</i>

'No more punishment' is a recurrent theme in traditional songs relating to freedom, as the following song demonstrates. Furthermore, it reveals what the slaves experienced as traumatic: it purveys the physical reality of being put in irons and being beaten. The notion of what freedom entailed, was also clearly expressed. It vents anger at what occurred during slavery and shows the slaves' aspirations regarding their new lives once free. The notion of being dependent during slavery is contrasted with independence after slavery. Several variants of this song have been collected over the years. The last verse of most of these songs ends with the conviction that with freedom one of the most humiliating tasks, washing someone else's chamber pot, would also end. The following is the oldest recorded

variant and was sung by a woman called Ma Chichi, who was interviewed by Brenneker in 1958 at the age of 106.²⁵ She was ten years old when the enslaved gained their freedom.

<i>Kaiman djuku</i>	<i>No more submission</i>
<i>Djuku kaiman</i>	<i>Submission no more</i>
<i>Mi n'ta laba tayó</i>	<i>I am not doing dishes</i>
<i>Mi n' ta laba kònchi mas</i>	<i>I am not washing the bowls anymore</i>
<i>Mi n' ta bari kas mas</i>	<i>I am not sweeping the house anymore</i>
<i>Mi no ta katibu di shon mas.</i> ²⁶	<i>I am not his master's slave anymore</i>

A second variant also emphasizes the treatment slaves had received:

<i>Libertat galité</i>	<i>Freedom, equality</i>
<i>Mi shon n' por bistimi heru mas</i>	<i>My master won't put iron-bars on me anymore</i>
<i>Libertat galité</i>	<i>Freedom, equality</i>
<i>Mi shon n' por bistimi heru mas</i>	<i>My master won't put iron-bars on me anymore</i>
<i>Libertat galité</i>	<i>Freedom, equality</i>
<i>Shon n'por suta katibu mas</i>	<i>The master cannot beat slaves anymore</i>
<i>Libertat galité</i>	<i>Freedom, equality</i>
<i>Shon n'por suta katibu mas</i>	<i>The master cannot beat slaves anymore</i>
<i>Libertat galité</i>	<i>Freedom, equality</i>
<i>Shon muhé mes lo laba tayó</i>	<i>The mistress herself will do her dishes</i>
<i>Libertat galité</i>	<i>Freedom, equality</i>
<i>Shon hòmber mes lo laba koprá.</i> ²⁷	<i>The master himself will wash his chamber pot</i>

And yet a third variant:

<i>Libertat galité</i>	<i>Freedom, equality</i>
<i>Shon muhé mes lo laba tayó</i>	<i>The mistress herself will do her dishes</i>
<i>Libertat galité</i>	<i>Freedom, equality</i>
<i>Pushi mes lo laba tayó</i>	<i>The cat will wash the dishes</i>
<i>Libertat galité</i>	<i>Freedom, equality</i>
<i>Shon hòmber mes lo laba koprá.</i> ²⁸	<i>The master himself will wash his chamber pot</i>

The two stanzas in these variants seem to sustain the common masters' question at the time of emancipation: will the manumitted former slaves work? The idea of 'lazy blacks' was a recurring theme in nineteenth-century literature. The above songs, of course, can also be read as a clear expression of people's desire to make choices in their lives, this only being possible once free.

The next informant was born in 1900 and learned about slavery from his grandfather. He displayed the awareness that slave-owners had received compensation for their slaves. His grandfather was a slave on one of the plantations near town and had related to him the atrocities of slavery.

R.F.: *Tempu di sklabitut tabata un tempu horibel. Hopi di nan a dreña boto di kanoa bai Coro. Hopi di nan a yega Coro i hopi a hoga tambe ora nan kanoa a bòltu. Ora klòk di libertat a bati, kos a kambia. Libertat a yega na yüli. Libertat a yega ku hopi barí di plaka.*

P.B.: *Barí di plaka?*

R.F.: *Sí, barí di plaka pa libra esnan sklabisá. Rei a manda nan.*

P.B.: *Rei a manda nan?*

E.J.: *Rei a manda plaka na barí?*²⁹

R.F.: *Slavery was a horrible time. Many took the canoe to Coro. Many reached Coro and many also drowned when their canoes turned over. When freedom came, things changed. Freedom came in July. Freedom came with a lot of barrels of money.*

P.B.: *Barrels of money?*

R.F.: *Yes, barrels of money to liberate the enslaved. The King sent them.*

P.B.: *The King sent them?*

E.J.: *The King sent money in barrels?*

To Lai the end of enslavement was equated to payment for work. He considered this the reason why the slave-owners had received compensation. He continued:

R.F.: *Sí, barí ku hopi plaka pa libra hendenan na Bándabou i na Bándariba. Hopi katibu: mucha, adulto, tur e katibunan. Si bo tabata ke pa nan traha pa bo, e ora ei lo bo mester a paga nan. Sí.*

P.B.: *Rei a manda un barí di plaka?*

R.F.: *Katibunan a fiesta tres dia largu. Tres dia largu na Kòrsou. Tur hende tabata liber na Kòrsou. No tabatin kuenta di bati hende mas. Sí.*³⁰

R.F.: *Yes, barrels with a lot of money to free people in Bandabou and Bandariba. Lots of slaves: children, adults, all the slaves. If you wanted them to work for you, then you would have to pay them. Yes.*

P.B.: *The King sent a barrel of money?*

R.F.: *The slaves feasted for three long days. Three long days in Curaçao. Everybody was free in Curaçao. Nobody would be beaten anymore. Yes.*

A similar story is being told as follows:

E kueba di Chichi ta di den tempu di katibu. Chichi a hui na estado bai ku su kompañ'é. Nan ta katibu. Nan ta kobarde pa sali. Un biaha ku e hòmber a bai Gato, bai buska kuminda, nan a must'é ku na Kòrsou tin libertat i el a disidí di bai bèk serka su doño.

*E shon yama Carlo Aster di Malpais. Kontentu shon a risibí e ku Chichi ku e tres yunan, pasobra pa kada katibu ku bira liber shon ta risibí plaka. Asina shon a haña 5 biaha 200 florin. Pa kada katibu rei a paga 200. Willem de derde a kumpra kada katibu pa 200.*³¹

Chichi's cave (Chichi is the name of a female slave) existed during slavery. Chichi fled together with her partner while she was pregnant. They were enslaved. They were afraid to come out. Once when the man went to Gato, people explained to him that there was freedom now and he decided to go back to his master.

The shon's name was Carlo Aster from Malpais. The shon was happy to welcome him and Chichi and their three children because he would receive money for each slave that became free. So the shon received 5 times 200 guilders. William the Third bought each slave for 200 guilders.

These notions were also expressed in traditional songs, such as the one collected by Brenneker and Juliana in 1960 from a male informant born in 1875.³²

*Muchu danki shon Wilmu di derdu,
ku awe nos ta ruman,
pero awó nos tur a bira katibu di shon Dios.
Laga nos gradisi ma na bon Dios
pa sielu i su bondat.³³*

*Thank you very much King William the Third
That today we are brothers and sisters
But now we are the slaves of Master God
Let us say grace, but to the good Lord for heav-
en and its goodness.*

The influence of the Catholic Church is also evident in the following song:

*Ban pidi Dios na rudia abou
ku su santu deboshon
awor nos ta liber di tur shon
liber di tur nashon
katibu di rei.³⁴*

*Let us ask God on our bare knees
with our holy devotion
now that we are free from all masters
free of all nation
slaves of the King*

The first of July was indelibly printed in the Afro-Curaçaoans' memory. Up until the twentieth century this date served as a reference point from which people deduced their birthday. The vicar Krugers wrote about how people at the first census in 1933, who did not remember their date of birth, would come to him for information and refer to the date of emancipation in order to calculate their age (Krugers 1934:59).

Conclusion

To conclude, both those with power and those without had their own perceptions of what emancipation would entail. Slave-owners, through formal institutions, voiced their concerns. To them, abolition implied giving the slaves personal autonomy and independence, thus placing them beyond their control. Even though they could not guarantee sufficient work for the freed, the former owners wanted a work force available as and when needed.

It is also clear that the Roman Catholic Church played an intermediate role in the way freedom was perceived by the slaves. The Church acknowledged the atrocities of slavery and portrayed freedom as the complete opposite. Freedom represented happiness, a lack of coerced labour. Yet the Church underlined the need to install an intrinsic work ethic alongside other virtues, such as abiding by the law and maintaining an orderly family life. It was also stressed to the manumitted former slaves that hatred and revenge should not be harboured or enacted on those who had ill-treated them. This influenced the way former slaves perceived freedom. To the Church freedom would bring the possibilities for a greater involvement in the moral uplifting of the former enslaved. They nevertheless had their own conceptions of what freedom offered, as is recorded in oral history.

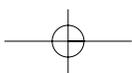
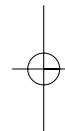
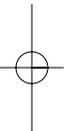
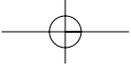
For those emancipated, freedom had yet another, deep-rooted meaning. This was manifested in their songs sung on Emancipation day, some of which were tambú songs. The choice for tambú was a manifestation of their autonomy as they brought to the fore their own expression of freedom, in a form which was previously prohibited by State and Church. These songs show what freedom meant to them, with the lyrics expressing joy

regarding the end of physical punishments for the slightest transgression. Above all it meant for them the hope of being able to choose the work, and indeed the life, they desired.

Notes

- 1 Discussions among slave-owners on Curaçao centered on the belief that black slaves, once free, would not hold a realistic view on what freedom would entail. According to Mintz and Price this feeling among slave-owners throughout the Americas was based on the assumption that with freedom the 'enslaved would relapse into their natural state' (1992:250).
- 2 NA, Ministerie van Koloniën, 1850-1900, inv. no. 6734, 31-12-1862/906. Slave-owners saw this type of conduct as a confirmation of their belief that blacks were naturally indolent and would work only under the firm direction of whites (Berlin and Morgan 1993:61).
- 3 *Kerkelijke Courant*, no. 368, vol. 30, 16-1-1864; *Amigoe*, 1-7-1863.
- 4 Idem.
- 5 Apparently Euwens presented this document to the library. In the accompanying letter the priest made assurances that this poem was made by a man emancipated on 1 July 1863. This poem is in the original orthography of 1863. The full title is 'Cantica pa celebrasjoon di e gran dia di libertat' (Song of the celebration of the great day of freedom) Bibliotheek Universiteit van de Nederlandse Antillen.
- 6 *Koloniaal Verslag* 1855, zitting 1857-1858.
- 7 *Koloniaal Verslag* 1856, zitting 1858-1859.
- 8 *Dividivi* (*Caesalpinia coriaria*); tannin is extracted from the pods.
- 9 Interview Amanda Manuela Fabian (born 1889), Allen, 9-4-1989 (NatAr).
- 10 KITLV, Koloniale Verslagen 1855, zitting 1857-1858.
- 11 *Kerkelijke Courant*, no. 291, vol. 28, 26-7-1862.
- 12 NatAr, Inventaris van het archief van het Gouvernementssecretarie, Ingekomen stukken, Buitendistricten Curaçao 1862, inv. no. 3686, 31-10-1862/238.
- 13 Interview with a woman born in 1916 (she did not want her name stated), Allen, March 2001 (NatAr).
- 14 Interview Virginia Meulens (born 1869 in Otrobanda), Brenneker/Juliana, 1959 (Zikinzá-collection, T 440, NatAr).
- 15 Interview Mervelita Comenencia (born 1903), Brenneker/Juliana, 1959 (Zikinzá-collection, T 611, NatAr).
- 16 Rosalia 1997:99.
- 17 It is unclear what the informant meant with the term 'queen', as there was a king reigning in the Netherlands at that moment.
- 18 Interview Shon Pa di Zegu (born 1899), Brenneker/Juliana, 1972 (T 24, Fundashon Biblioteka Públiko Kòrsou).
- 19 Interview Martina Felipe (born 1893), Allen, 13-1-1983 (NatAr).
- 20 See also interview Henriqueta Garcia (born 1898), Brenneker/Juliana, June 1980 (Zikinzá-collection, T 75, NatAr), in which the woman relates how emancipation is due to the intermediation of Queen Victoria, the mother of Wilhelmina.
- 21 Interview Lucia Hato (born 1886), 1959 (T 881); Cai Maduro (date of birth not registered), 1958 (T 705); Herman Peloso (born 1882), 1959 (Brenneker/Juliana, T 721, Zikinzá-collection, NatAr).
- 22 Martinus 1997:258.
- 23 'Ka' in Caboverdian means a negation of something, while 'mais' means more. 'Djuku', compara-

- ble to 'jugo' in Portuguese, means submission. 'Kaiman djuku, djuku kaiman' then translates as 'no more submission, submission no more' (Martinus 1997:258).
- 24 On the day of freedom, Virginia Meulens' (Ma Djini) mother was not a slave and was living in town. Ma Djini strongly emphasized the free status of her mother during the interview, thus showing that she wanted to disassociate herself from slavery. The fact, however, that her mother could remember two of these songs may indicate some ties with recently freed people. Interview Virginia Meulens (born 1869 in Otrobanda), Brenneker/Juliana, 1959 (Zikinzá-collection, T 440, NatAr).
 - 25 Interview Ma Chichi (born 1853), Brenneker/Juliana, 1958 (Zikinzá-collection, T 607, NatAr).
 - 26 Idem.
 - 27 Interview Pa Allee (born 1899), Brenneker/Juliana, 1958 (T 606); Marvelita Comenencia (born 1903), Brenneker/Juliana, 1959 (Zikinzá-collection, T 611, NatAr). See also Robertico (Lai) Felicia (born 1900), Brenneker/Juliana, 6-11-1986 (T 120, Fundashon Biblioteka Públiko Kòrsou). See also Rosalia 1997:101.
 - 28 Interview Cola Susana (born 1915), project Etnomusicologie/Allen and Gansemans, 15-5-1983, NatAr.
 - 29 Interview Robertico (Lai) Felicia (born 1900), Brenneker/Juliana, 6-11-1986 (T 120, Fundashon Biblioteka Públiko Kòrsou).
 - 30 Idem.
 - 31 Interview Francisco Conquet (born 1882), Brenneker/Juliana, 1959 (Zikinzá-collection, T 656, NatAr).
 - 32 Interview Wawa Willems (born 1875), Brenneker/Juliana, 1960 (Zikinzá-collection, T 435, NatAr).
 - 33 Interview Eligio Maduro (born 1886), Brenneker/Juliana, 1959 (Zikinzá-collection, T 730, NatAr).
 - 34 Interview Wawa Willems (born 1875), Brenneker/Juliana, 1960 (Zikinzá-collection, T 435, NatAr).



CHAPTER V

The Role of the State and the Plantation Owners after Emancipation

Introduction

Many studies have considered emancipation as simply an end to coerced labour. Under slavery the discipline of the enslaved was left to the discretion of their masters. With emancipation, this legal authority to control the activities, and even lives, of people was effectively removed. Former slaves became subject to State regulations, with the protection this afforded – they were now ‘equal’ citizens within society. Consequently, the responsibility for punishment, in the event of a breach of the law, passed into the hands of State appointed authorities.

However, the real nature of freedom is obscured if we see it solely in terms of legality and fail to examine it as a process involving a series of complex interactions between former slaves, former masters and several other institutions (Scott 1987:565). Freedom has indeed necessitated the alteration of many existing rules to accommodate this change in social positions. This, in reality, was more complicated than just introducing laws and regulations for a society with wide social inequalities. The perceptions and actions of individuals do not automatically change overnight solely due to the introduction of new laws.

As the economic historian Stanley L. Engerman (1992:53) states, in the Caribbean the abolition of slavery entailed dramatic legal effects. Nevertheless, aspects such as policy and the locus of political, social and economic power in society continued in place. The higher class remained predominantly white and continued to lead the economic, political and cultural spheres in society, while most blacks remained subjected – even though no longer enslaved. In addition to this race factor, when former slaves joined the lower classes, the perception the upper and middle classes held of this group influenced the way emancipation evolved socially (Engerman 1992:53). In the Caribbean, the abolition of slavery thus basically redefined the legal parameters within which social interaction between people of unequal status, based on racial differences, could take place. The State played a prominent and instrumental role in shaping the legal framework of social relations. In most cases State intervention served to maintain the extant socio-racial hierarchy. In this Chapter I will focus on the manner in which this occurred within Curaçaoan society.

In the entire Caribbean, the State introduced laws aimed at ordering the lives of those acquiring citizenship. This group joined the previously manumitted. Plantation owners feared a scarcity of labour following emancipation. They believed that as a consequence of these changes, workers would leave the plantations in search of better prospects. Due to this expectation, in the British Caribbean as well as in the Dutch colony of Suriname, a

period of apprenticeship was introduced and in many cases contract labourers were employed from as far afield as British India, Java and China.

On Curaçao, where the economy was not based on plantation revenue, concerns regarding labour following emancipation were of a different nature. Curaçao's labour surplus, coupled with a limited amount of fertile land and the general perception of blacks being undisciplined, induced the State to become a prime instrument in maintaining work discipline. The new laws were dominated by the racist ideas of the time, which assumed that former slaves would be unable to cope with their new status. As I will demonstrate, this group had to constantly struggle against these preconceptions in developing their own identity.

Another factor complicating integration was the composition of the Curaçaoan elite: this was not a homogeneous group but encompassed different interest groups, including many from the field of commerce. This was largely due to fact that the plantations contributed little to the island economy (Rupert 1999:128, 213). Consequently, post-emancipation politics on the island were not solely concerned with the interests of the plantation owners, but were to a greater extent shaped by those of the other elite groups. This was contrary to the norm in the Caribbean. I will also examine how this has affected the introduction and implementation of rules and laws pertaining to those emancipated.

The purpose of this Chapter is to study the role the State played in determining the life pattern of the freed Afro-Curaçaoans. I will give an overview of how the State used laws, regulations and policies to control aspects of their lives in terms of economy, relationships, religion and recreation. Finally, I will examine the way in which State and people interacted, and I will analyse how Afro-Curaçaoans responded to these specific forms of control.

Law and Order on Curaçao: A New Phase

In the year of emancipation, governmental responsibility lay in the hands of a governor, who held legislative, executive and juridical powers. He was assisted by a Colonial Council comprised of plantation owners and merchants. In the months leading up to emancipation, the State introduced four laws aimed at giving structure to the lives of those to be freed. They came into effect on 1 July 1863. Similar laws were already in existence and dealt with the group previously manumitted. Now, with impending freedom, these laws were expanded to encompass the new situation.

With the ending of the traditional forms of social control exercised by the plantation owners, members of the upper class were convinced that Afro-Curaçaoans would not know how to behave with the newly acquired freedom and feared a deterioration of their behaviour. Those living in the outer districts in particular, expressed their concerns on this issue and were generally more resistant to emancipation.

Thus, with slavery at an end, responsibility for maintaining order among the Afro-Curaçaoans lay in the hands of the colonial State. The content of the new laws expressed the concerns of the upper class. Government expenditure dramatically increased as a result of the implementation of new laws. In addition to the State having to compensate the

slave-owners for the loss of their property, much of the colonial budget was swallowed up by policing and juridical matters. Part of the budget also went to improving the social conditions of the district masters, whose responsibilities were broadened. Within the new structure they were paid a salary and given a house; for this purpose the government purchased plantation houses. The expenses incurred, particularly on Curaçao, led to heated discussions in the House of Commons on whether Dutch involvement with the islands should continue at all (Renkema 1976).

The main areas of State intervention were in labour, public order and security. One of the new laws dealt with the island's division into five districts.¹ Another law which directly influenced the lives of Afro-Curaçaoans pertained to the transportation of animals, wood, charcoal and agricultural products on the public roads and was aimed at preventing the theft of these products.² The law which dealt with hiring domestic servants, workers and labourers was enforced in order to safeguard the availability of certain groups of workers when needed.³ A law preventing idleness and vagrancy was instituted as well.⁴

The Vagrancy Law and its Effect on Labour Discipline

Oostindie (1997:67) concludes that from a colonial perspective, the principal problem at emancipation was how to secure work for the newly freed. Indeed, the State Commission preparing for emancipation had foreseen that unemployment would become a problem, particularly in the countryside. As agriculture was rarely profitable, emancipation presented the prospect of immediate impoverishment. Slaves in the countryside mainly did seasonal work: on average slaves spent six months of the year working on the plantation, while during quiet times a variety of jobs outside the plantation were undertaken. As most labour opportunities were in the sector of commerce in town, some would be hired out to work there as bricklayers, carpenters, blacksmiths, stevedores, servants, seamstresses and washerwomen. Or they were employed in the craft related industries in town, or as sailors on vessels which plied the region. Some of the slaves manumitted before 1863 continued to work in the fields, or they undertook activities on the plantations relating to export, such as collecting seeds from the dividivi trees and keeping livestock (Rupert 1999:128, 213). It is also recorded that a large number became destitute.

It was highly unlikely that after emancipation, plantation owners would hire workers just for the sake of keeping them busy. They were more likely to hire labour as and when needed (Staatscommissie 1856:228). In preparation for emancipation, the State made some attempts to provide employment for the soon to be freed by creating work on the government plantations.⁵ However, the Dutch colonial government did not consider it its duty to provide the former slaves with work. This was openly stated in a letter by the governor to the administrator of the island of St. Eustatius, who had requested the sum of 800 guilders in order to create work for former slaves on the island.⁶

As projected, the availability of work remained limited and scarce after emancipation. A major problem facing the government was thus how to enforce labour discipline within a system with a large surplus of workers, coupled with the fact that when labour opportunities did present themselves, they were only on a short-term basis. Despite there being few

job opportunities, planters still needed a disciplined and dependable work force, as was the case in other plantation societies (Foner 1983:10).

This anxiety was only increased by the notion that blacks lacked a good work ethic and self-discipline. The question 'will the free Afro-Curaçaoan be willing to work after the abolition of slavery?' was a persistent one. A high ranking military officer interviewed by the Commission preparing for freedom emphasized this concern as he described his views on the lack of discipline amongst blacks. He stated that he had 'commanded the last reserve of soldiers, in which there are many freed blacks. It takes great effort to instill discipline in these men.' According to him, this attitude was based on 'the notion of the Negro that (...) I must become free, not where will I work and how will I take care of myself' (Staatscommissie 1856:243). The belief that blacks were lazy and unambitious would persist after emancipation. In 1868 A.D. van der Gon Netscher, a board member of the 'Koninklijk Instituut voor de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch Indië' (KITLV), even suggested that convicts from the Netherlands should, as a way of serving their time, be sent to Curaçao and be put to the heavy and more arduous work formerly done by slaves, such as working on the salt-pans, burning chalk, baking tiles and stones, and chopping wood (1868:466). According to him, the knife would cut both ways: the motherland would be free of its criminals, while the newly emancipated in particular would be taught and given an example of European knowledge, will-power and diligence. In making this suggestion, van der Gon Netscher ignored the fact that often this kind of work was not available on the island. Indolence and idleness were seen as consequences of the lack of discipline among the black population and were cited as a reason for criminal activity such as theft. This rapidly became an issue of great concern for both the elite and the State, as they sought ways to control and eradicate the problem (van der Lee 1998:6). Three years after emancipation, a district master wrote in a letter to the governor that 'the best way of inducing civil behaviour among the working class is to suppress laziness and theft with all force'.⁷

The white elite feared that once the enslaved became free, they would leave the plantations, go wandering from place to place and steal as they went. Criminalizing vagrancy was then considered the best way of enforcing a work discipline.⁸ In this way the State tried to establish an element of control over the former slaves who, it was considered, would misinterpret freedom as unlimited liberty and independence. In addition, it was thought that these measures would help to regulate the labour supply in a fluctuating economy.

The new law defined a vagrant as someone lacking permanent accommodation and sufficient means of support.⁹ Those falling foul of the vagrancy law were usually poor, able-bodied and unemployed; they tended to wander, and thus were prone to stealing in order to keep themselves alive. Beggars, except those requiring special care, such as the old and the handicapped, were not exempt. Every year the district commissioners had to report to the Procurator of the King the names of those who were blind, crippled, paralyzed or old and therefore unable to support themselves. The term 'vagrant' included those encountered wandering at night in gardens, corrals, galleries, vessels and public places without permission.

The application of the law against idleness also being applied to nightly activities was intended to control theft. Plantation owners took practical measures and asked for permission to fence their land.¹⁰ It was known for them to buy a piece of public land from the

government in order to keep members of the working class at a distance.¹¹ From emancipation into the twentieth century, planters would continually accuse the black population of theft and refer to their neighbourhoods as ‘thieves’ dens’.¹²

Vagrants were sentenced to hard labour by the government in the form of building and maintaining public property or infrastructure which was contracted out to private companies.¹³ The money earned by these prisoners went towards their subsistence and the payment of their fines (Onrust 1998). Simple imprisonment, it was thought, would not be experienced as a punishment by blacks as they were considered lazy by nature – therefore forced labour would be a fitting punishment (Bossers 2000:250). Not only were the vagrants themselves punished, but also family and friends who aided them.

The vagrancy law made no distinction between the sexes. However, the State, in its attempt to instill a labour discipline, made a distinction between minors and adults. Vagrants yet to reach the age of sixteen could be placed at the disposal of the Curaçaoan police. They could also be incarcerated for up to eight days, after which they would be returned to their parents or guardians; measures were introduced to provide training, education and support.¹⁴ Some parents utilized the vagrancy law in order to discipline their children. Such was the case of Maria Louiza Hart, who did not know what to do with her 18 year old son, as he was a thief and a vagrant. She therefore petitioned the district master to place him in permanent service. She was successful and as a result her son was sent to work on a plantation, where he received food, clothing and accommodation and was above all controlled.¹⁵

The vagrancy law required the newly freed to carry an emancipation letter, otherwise they faced prosecution. The people who lived on the infertile plots called the *sabana* were particularly likely to be prosecuted. They were believed to set a bad example to their own children, thus inducing them to become idle and therefore vagrants. Their population increase troubled the white elite, who voiced dissatisfaction concerning the large number of animals they kept and the damage this caused to their lands. The elite complained that these blacks were lazy and shifty and that they chose to live on infertile land, making survival possible only by stealing from the plantations. The plantation owners viewed them as a menace.¹⁶

In the course of time, the word ‘vagabond’ – in Papiamentu ‘bagamundu’ – was used as a term of abuse directed at both men and women. People used the term to signify worthlessness and disorderliness. A male who was called a ‘bagamundu’ was a troublemaker, someone not conforming to the social norms. However, people generally considered a female vagrant to be the most despicable and immoral of all creatures. Women accused of being a ‘bagamundu’ considered this very offensive and sometimes took the accuser to court. For example, a 48 year old straw hat maker named Philip was taken to court by a woman named Maximiliana after he had verbally insulted her in public. He had called her a stinking ‘negress, a whore and a vagrant’ who had roamed about and had had so many men that her ‘lower part had become rotten’.¹⁷ In another case a 25 year old washerwoman was called ‘the biggest whore and vagrant who has ever existed, and a thief who has even stolen a golden earring from the ear of a child’.¹⁸

Working with Contracts

The plantation owners made contracts with some labourers. These could be made orally in the presence of a district master, who recorded the duration, the amount and the payment deadline. In the case of a dispute arising, the word of the district master was given precedence. Should the labourer under contract be absent from work without a legitimate reason, according to the district master he would forfeit his wages and any other benefit he may have been entitled to. But the contracts also protected the interests of the employed. If the plantation owner decided to terminate the contract he was obliged to compensate him for the time worked.¹⁹

However, these contracts proved largely ineffective. The former slaves either did not show any willingness to enter into contracts or, if they did, were more disposed to breaking them rather than keeping them. The itinerant nature of the labour force remained problematic. A clear example of this is shown in the following case brought against a shepherd named Telly. The district master complained that this shepherd did not meet his obligations and that he left the herd unattended. He accused him of not wanting to work, even though the work was light. In addition, the shepherd was cared for, clothed and treated well. In his letter to the Attorney General, the district master addressed the issue of curbing idleness and wanted the shepherd to be made 'an example of'.²⁰ The family also suffered the consequences: in the following year the shepherd's mother was removed from the government land, being accused of allowing her son to become idle and unruly.²¹

Former slaves would leave the plantations as soon as they became aware of better opportunities in town. Their possibility of moving to town became a test of the reality of freedom. In a letter dated 6 January 1864, the owner of the plantation San Sebastiaan stated that many former slaves had left for town and that they no longer wanted to work on his plantation. This type of complaint was common.²² The district masters continuously complained that the law of 16 January 1863 (PB 1863/116), regarding the employment of servants, was inadequate and left them powerless to deal with those who were not diligent in their duties.²³

After emancipation it took some time to find viable methods of labour control and to re-establish a pattern in the working relationship. An example of this is the case of Martis Ignacio. He was detained temporarily after having been accused by the planter of stealing coals from his plantation. Ignacio was acquitted by the court, which considered his felony a breach of contract rather than a criminal act. The discussion revolved around whether a worker living on the plantation who sold the charcoal burned from plantation-wood, had stolen or had broken his contract. The plantation owner considered it theft, but the judge saw it as a breach of contract and even stated that the owner had the right of possession of the wood and had to pay the workers a salary to burn the wood.²⁴

Soon after emancipation some plantations owners made new petitions to make breaking a contract a criminal offence; this would force labourers to complete the terms of their contract.²⁵ They demanded punishment ranging from fines to imprisonment for those who broke their work agreements. These complaints were heeded and the law was extended in 1865.²⁶

This law clearly laid down the penalties should a contract be broken (PB 1865/12). A fisherman named Martijn Dammers, aged 38, was penalized under this law for not complying with his agreement.²⁷ The law was also used to prosecute Andries Doran, who had

broken his contract with the plantation owner. Along with his family he left to live with his father Jose Doran on a savanna. In order to set a precedence the father was also punished for employing his son and allowing him to live with him.²⁸

There was close co-operation between the State and the plantation owners on this issue of land use. The regulation of 23 August 1864/554 stated that individuals who already possessed a piece of land on a plantation and who could provide a living for themselves and for their family, would not be able to rent a piece of government land. When people requested a piece of land from the government, outside the plantation where they lived and worked, the plantation owners in question would sometimes, through various means, block the departure of the worker – this would usually occur if the individual was a particularly valued worker. These people were also refused a piece of land by applying the same regulation. Those who asked for permission were deemed wanting to ‘act on one’s own’ or ‘trying to become independent’. Of those who did not fall into this category, and who had requested a piece of land from the district master, the latter inquired whether the plantation owners in the surrounding area had any objections. This also applied to those who asked for a piece of land to keep animals on. Any objection on the part of the plantation owners would result in the petitioner failing to receive the piece of land. They were hence forced to remain on the plantations.

A piece of land could also be refused if situated too close to a plantation. Through the distribution of land the government tried to eradicate what it considered improper behaviour. Land could be refused if the conduct of the applicant was in doubt. When individuals requested a piece of land, the district master would gather information on their character and would then advise the governor of their suitability. As the plantation owners were consulted on this matter, they continued to have influence on whether a person would receive a piece of land in the neighbourhood of their plantation. The district master, in making his assessment, considered a number of factors: was the applicant industrious, hard-working, motivated and respectful of authority? Idleness was a criterion for being refused land.²⁹ Impertinence was another criterion. A person could have been refused a piece of land for merely answering back to a planter on one occasion. People who worked in town were automatically refused a piece, simply because they lived in town and their behaviour was often unknown to the district master, making it difficult for him to assess the person’s suitability.³⁰

Within the contract of those who did receive government land were detailed conditions which they had to adhere to. As blacks were believed to be of an explosive character and easily disposed to violence, it was stated that they were not allowed to sell liquor or hold a tambú feast on their land.³¹ People would be evicted from government land when they broke the contract.

Policing in Post-Emancipation Society

In order to exercise social control, the island was decentralized into five districts instead of three, as was the case before emancipation. These comprised four rural districts and one urban district. It is not surprising that the rural areas saw a greater increase in policing

than the urban district. It is here that the greater part of enslaved were freed, and where the traditional forms of social control no longer existed. In the rural areas the free black population doubled at emancipation.

A master, or 'commissioner', was placed at the head of each district, and was responsible for its control and administration. The rural commissioners had broader responsibilities than their urban counterpart. It was expected that the commissioners in the outer districts would exercise stricter control over the people. They had to patrol their district weekly and the outlying parts once a month.

One aspect of this was to communicate with those people wishing to discuss issues or settle disagreements. The district master would also determine who was in need of social aid. However, given the distance to these outlying districts and the state of the roads, the fulfillment of these tasks proved arduous, as was evident in their reports. Furthermore, the commissioner was also responsible for the implementation of regulations relating to agriculture, gardening, forestry, animal husbandry and water supply. For example, he was required to police the harvest celebrations. As stated before, the harvesting of maize was sometimes celebrated in the form of *seú* – which could become a public activity, with many participants and onlookers.

In the outer districts the commissioners organized the maintenance of the public infrastructure and properties, and supervised the public roads (PB 1863/19). Specific to the rural districts was the role of assistant officer in the registration office. The commissioner registered the births and deaths within his district and legalized marriages. Every year he had to report on and evaluate the affairs of his district. Aside from these administrative matters, he was involved with police and juridical matters. He was responsible for maintaining law and order and could administer punishment in minor civil and criminal cases. The responsibilities of the district masters were thus complex and wide ranging. They were crime fighters, bureaucrats, intelligence officers and social workers all at the same time.

In addition to descent and rank, another requisite for becoming a commissioner in the outer districts was to be familiar with both Dutch and Papiamentu. The commissioner should be someone who 'knew the inhabitants of the districts and talked their language'. Those in the outer districts functioned as a communication channel between the government, the land owners and the populace. In court cases they would collect information and evidence regarding places and people in order to assess the validity of a case (Fliet 1969:15).

Most of the time these district commissioners were plantation owners themselves or were either friends or related by blood or marriage to the owners in their districts. The State was fully aware of these relationships and in order to avoid conflict of interest it was stated that commissioners should not own a plantation or any other business in their district. However, some could not ignore the strong ties they had with other plantation owners and in disputes regarding work and land, they were often biased (Renkema 1981a:332; PB 1863/19).

An example of this is illustrated in the following case, which occurred soon after emancipation. The Church and State opposed each other on the issue of work: should people be permitted to work on Sundays and holidays? In a confidential letter dated 16 July 1866 to all district masters on the island the governor had asked whether the Catholic priests were

preaching in a way that could hamper the relationship between the former masters and their servants.³² It was then that the commissioner in the western part of the island at San Sebastiaan put forward the case of Federica. She had been imprisoned for three days due to her refusal to work on Sundays, the day of worship; she had also refused to apologize. When confronted by the commissioner, the priest had declared that 'he would continue to preach that labourers and servants should not work for the planters on Sundays'. Instructed by the governor, the commissioner expressed his conviction that working on Sundays was indispensable for the planters, as they had to take their products to town on Sunday evenings. He also feared 'the loss of labour control if the black population accepted these ideas as the planters would then be without workers'.³³

Conflicts between commissioners and the people within their districts were exacerbated by the dictates of the law which stipulated the fining of trespassers for small offences (Sjiem Fat 1986:97). A more liberal approach was deemed beneficial by P. Sassen, the Procurator General who in 1870 recommended in a circular letter to deal with minor infringements of the law through verbal reprimand.

There were some district masters who sided with the black population. This was evident in the case of the master who openly wrote in 1867 that the two plantation owners who requested to buy a piece of land from the government in order to keep blacks away from their area, were exaggerating the 'bad' behaviour of the inhabitants in that neighbourhood.³⁴ Another example comes from the district commissioner J.P. Eskildsen, who refuted the criticisms of the popular class made by the plantation owners.³⁵ Eskildsen gave a detailed view of how the planters behaved towards the people on their plantations. In a letter he protested against their recurring accusation that the neighbourhoods of the working class were thieves' nests (Renkema 1981a:157).

The district commissioners had to exercise control during a period when authority was believed to be subjective, based on colour and race, and when laws generally reinforced this belief. In most cases, the commissioners could assert their status due to their colour or class. In interviews, informants born at the end of the nineteenth century respectfully referred to them as *mener*. An informant would say 'M'a pidi mener un pida tera', meaning: I requested the mister a piece of land. In the following *tambù* song this is evident.

*Mi ta bai puntra shon Meneer
Ku por ta hustu esei
Pa mi tin mi kappa
Anto mi no tin derechi
Pa mi busk'é
Telele telela*³⁶

*I went to ask mister
If this is justified
For me to have my billy goat (sterilized)
And I don't have the right
To go and look for it
Telele telela*

Successive district commissioners complained about their limited powers, budgetary constraints and legal limitations. They would also constantly express anxiety about their low pay, the heavy administrative workload, the lack of working material and vague and insufficient instructions.³⁷ In an evaluation of the position of the masters in the outer districts, the historian Hamelberg compared them to the *bomba*. According to Hamelberg, they were given the role of police superintendent, paid a subsistence salary, and above all were overworked.³⁸

The former enslaved expressed their hostility towards such district masters in what Scott calls the hidden transcripts. There are cases where the offensive behaviour of the district commissioners became the topic of the day for the popular class. The following story comes from an interview Juliana conducted with people from Banda Riba, in which the name Janchi Benta was often mentioned. Janchi played an instrument called the *benta*³⁹ and during gatherings he sang songs relating to topical issues. Because of his ability to function as a mouthpiece for the community by using the *benta*, he was given the nickname Janchi Benta. The following song recalled by an informant of Juliana, was one he played. The lyrics concern a district master who sent policemen to search for stolen goats, while he himself sent people out to steal for him. Janchi Benta saw this and made a song, highlighting the irony of the situation.

*Mener de Riter di Jansofat
Mener de Riter ta ladron
Mener de Riter di Jansofat
Ata Mener ta kome bestia
Mener de Riter di Jansofat
Mener de Riter ta ladron*⁴⁰

*Mister de Riter of Jansofat
Mister de Riter is a thief
Mister de Riter of Jansofat
Look at how the mister eats animals
Mister de Riter of Jansofat
Mister de Riter is a thief*

Janchi Benta was sent to prison. According to written documents he was accused of organizing gatherings and illegally selling alcohol in the neighbourhood, whereas people claimed it was because of this song that he was imprisoned.⁴¹

In the beginning of the twentieth century the authority of the district masters became questioned more openly by the general public. People resisted their power by making use of the legal system now open to them. For example, in 1902 Lambertus Koeiman and Alexander Nijs went directly to the Procurator General, complaining that they had politely requested the district master several times for a piece of land, but each time they had been sent home empty-handed.⁴² The aforementioned Eduardo Tokaai proudly narrated how he had been able to receive his piece of land in the 1920s, despite the obstacles placed in his path by the district master who had close ties with the plantation owners.

E hòmber ku bo ta bai pidi un pida tera, nan(shonnan) ta stòp e. No no no. Mi ta bai kontabo kon mi a haña e pida tera aki. Mi tabata traha kas na Skalo.

The man to whom you have to go for a piece of land, they (the plantation owners) are going to stop him. No, no, no. I will tell you how I got this piece of land: I was building houses at Scharloo.

Kas grandi, bai te Pietermaai. Mi tabata traha komo peon pa un hende di Banda Bou. Un sier-to hende, e persona ku nos tabata traha p'e, a bini sinta interim pa 4 luna na lugá di e districtmeester, ku a bai.

Big house, going all the way to Pietermaai. Well, I worked as an unskilled labourer for someone from Banda Bou. A certain person, the man we were working for, came to sit interim for some four months in place of the district commissioner, who had left.

Interim ta nifiká te ora e mener bini bèk. Anto m'a kont'é kuantu problema nos tin pa haña un

'Interim' means until the gentleman came back. And I told him how much trouble we had

vida di tera. E interim a bisa nos: Ahan si, bo no ta haña tera, paso shonnan ta manda koko leplap pa mener, i e ta bebe awa di leplap i ultrahá boso.

E ora ei el a puntrami: 'Kuantu di boso ta buska tera? Buska nòmber di kuater òf sinku amigu di boso, trese e nòmbernan p'ami i bo ta haña tera.'

Mi a trese e papel. Nos a haña e tera (informante ta klap den su man). E mesun dia. Nos tur a haña tera. Ta e interim a duna nos e. No e mener ku ta bebe awa di koko leplap ku e doñonan di kunuku. Ora bo bai buska tera, shon ta bisa: No dun'é tera.

Naturalmente mener no ta bisabo ku ta shon a bis'é esei. Despues ku nos tur a haña nos tera, shon a keda nanishi largu. (Tokaai ta traha nanishi largu ku su dedenan).⁴³

to get a piece of land. The interim district master said to me: Oh yes, you all don't get any land because the land owners send young coconuts for the gentleman; they drink coconut water and oppress you.

Then he asked me: 'How many of you are looking for land? Find the names of at least four or five friends of yours, bring them to me and you will get land.'

I brought the paper. We got land (the informant claps his hands). The same day. We all got land. It was the interim district master who gave it to us. Not the gentleman who drinks coconut water together with the land owners. When you go and ask for a piece of land, the land owner would say: 'Don't give him land.'

Of course, the district master would not say that the land owner said that. After we got our land, the land owner's nose remained long (the informant makes a long nose with his fingers).

In complying with the demands of the planter class, civil police was expanded at the time of emancipation.⁴⁴ Policing in post-emancipation Curaçaoan society was conducted in a similar way to other Caribbean societies, with more emphasis on the prevention of civil disturbance than on the prevention of crime (Richards 1993:1). Plantation owners complained to the district masters and they in turn complained to the governor that the police force was too small. This argument was often used to restrict large formations of 'negro huts' in a district. It was argued that the existing number of policemen was insufficient to adequately fight the problems relating to the illegal trade in liquor, stolen goods and other forms of disorderly behaviour.⁴⁵

The local population called the military police *mareshosé*.⁴⁶ They had a lower social status than the white planter class. Some did not know the local language and would keep their distance, rarely forming relations with the local population. However, over time members of the corps would become more connected with the black lower class and affairs and marriages were not unknown.⁴⁷ This pattern already existed before emancipation (van Dissel 1857:114). This presented a problem for the colonial government. Van der Gon Netscher vilified these military policemen for such actions. One reason for this was that most of these policemen were already at an old age when they started a family, so that when they died, their young widows became impoverished and had to appeal for government aid (1868:466). Indirectly, this type of relationship between whites and blacks also meant a break-down in the system ideally characterized by separation between the sexes.

Below the military police were the police patrol men, with less authority. Most of them belonged to the black lower class. From the start of emancipation attempts were made to recruit policemen from the districts. In a note to the commissioner of the third district, the governor requested that:

*In the interest of law and order, it is desirable to select capable persons who live in the negro villages and in the inhabited part of the outer districts, who will be given the responsibility to maintain peace and order.*⁴⁸

This was an attempt to create ties between the police system and the people in the communities. But many were opposed to this idea, based on the racial stereotype that ‘blacks could not exercise authority over their own people’ (Koloniale Verslagen 1870). In his response to the governor the district commissioner stated: ‘There is a propensity among blacks for violence and a lack of respect for authority.’⁴⁹ Others thought that their being part of the black population hindered them from behaving impartially. One district master dismissed his black watchman as he ‘behaved as though a family member of the people he dealt with’: they should be integrated but remain impartial. The colonial reports often complained that it was very difficult to find suitable patrol officers (Koloniale Verslagen 1875). Those appointed found themselves constantly fighting against the prejudices of the district commissioner, who often claimed that they were unsuited for the job.

The conditions of employment were generally unfavourable. For example, they had to be at the disposal of the service at all times. They also had to own a means of transport. On top of that, they were in temporary service and did not have the position of civil servants; they could not claim a pension and could be dismissed at any time.⁵⁰

The lack of integration of the military police into the communities created problems. There is evidence that they asserted their power in an aggressive way when dealing with the lower class. In some cases people would react to this by resisting arrest, but this would often lead to further maltreatment. As people used songs to express resistance, the military police also became the subject of songs, like the one recorded below: ‘Ai bin dal mi, ku bo por!’ (Come and hit me if you dare).

Bin dal mi, ku bo por
Bin dal mi
Pa mi bolbe dal bo
Bin dal mi mareshosé
*Bin dal mi*⁵¹

Come and hit me if you dare
Come and hit me
I will hit you back
Come and hit me, military police
Come and hit me

The authority of the military police was undermined by the fact that they did not always set a good example themselves. Some drank excessively.⁵² For example, Pieterella and Constantien Lourens complained about Billiet, a military policeman who under the influence of alcohol had pulled up the dress of their seventeen year old daughter Melanie, and who had also given her a cuff on the ear. He was subsequently sent to jail.⁵³ In another case, the district master was called in frequently during the disputes between Petroneeltje and her husband: a police sergeant who, while drunk, would maltreat his wife and children.⁵⁴ Others were reported to the district masters for drinking in public places while on duty. Their punishment was likely to be dismissal or reduction in rank.⁵⁵

In order to improve its functioning and image in the community, in 1872 the military force was reorganized. The colonial report of the following year already concluded that an improvement in conduct by policemen was apparent. They attributed this to the increase

in salary, by which they could attract men more suited to the profession (Koloniale Verslagen 1873). In the course of time, the government would interfere in the private lives of the policemen in order to increase their respectability within the community and improve their image. For example, married policemen who were caught having an affair were transferred to another station on the island.⁵⁶ This effort was acknowledged by the Roman Catholic Church. In an article in *La Cruz* of 14 August 1918, concerning the reorganization of the police force, the author wrote:

Luckily they have reorganized the police force. Military police are to be replaced by civilians. There is the prospect of great change and improvement if they choose competent people to become policemen, decent people, and respectable people from good families. One of the requirements for becoming a good policeman is abstinence from alcohol. The government should introduce a law punishing those who sell alcohol to policemen, as this is done in the United States.

The Church on Curaçao expected the State to judge people using the same criteria it did. As will be clear from Chapter VI, the clergy mainly emphasized respectability. This referred both to actual behaviour and to family roots. Thus individuals coming from a 'good family', that is not born out of wedlock, were deemed to be more trustworthy. One month later the issue of respectability was once again mentioned in the same newspaper.

Now we have a civilian police force, which everybody prefers to the military police. People say that the civilian force is less rough and that they know how to behave in Curaçao. Let us see how things will develop now. If the police will conduct themselves well, they will give a good example of order and discipline, if they will not talk too loud, use foul language, will not drink and laugh with suspicious women, then Curaçao will develop through this change.⁵⁷

The following lyrics were sung when the police wanted to stop a tambú gathering. It demonstrates that such high expectations were not always met and that it was necessary for the government to introduce this measure.

*Brigadir de Ruyter ta mi mari
Mi tin derecho di balia barf⁵⁸*

*Bregadir de Ruyter is my boyfriend
I have the right to dance the drum*

The notion of respectability was manifest in the policemen's appearance, with special attention being paid to their dress code. They would be remembered by most people due to their uniform. An interviewee born in 1910 recalled her father, who was a policeman before working for the mining company.

*E tabata un hòmbler hóben ora e tabata traha
komo polis. Ei na Roi Canario, tabata hopi
mondí ku palu di mangel. Ora un hende hoga
aya na Roi Canario, hopi biaha hende ta hoga*

*He was young when he was a policeman. There
at Roi Canario, there were woods with very
many mangrove bushes. When someone
drowned there in Roi Canario, people would*

den e awa den e mondinan ei, e mester a bai den pa saka e kurpa sin bida for di awa. No ta manera awor aki. Semper e mester ta limpi i bon bistí. Tambe ora e mester saka un kadaver for di awa. Mi mama ta rabia i e ta bisa: di kon mi mester laba i guma bo pañanan djis pa bo dreña awa i saka un kurpa sin bida.⁵⁹

often drown in the water in those bushes, he had to go in and take the corpse from the water. It is not like now. He always had to go very clean and decently dressed. Even when he had to take a corpse out of the water. My mother used to get very angry about it and she would say: why should I wash and starch your clothes just for you to go inside the water and take out a corpse.'

Brenneker notes that until the 1940s Afro-Curaçaoan men were not eager to join the police force, based on the assumption that one 'had to use violence against your own people' (1986:249). In this connection, Sythoff's observation still holds true. He wrote that 'policemen were despised by the people', to the extent that 'blacks who stand close to them were repudiated by their own families' (1857:114).

Land Resources

Jeanne Besson has stated that planters in the Caribbean were generally against the freed population owning land, and preferred them to remain living on the plantations, thus creating dependency (2001:13). On Curaçao a similar pattern was visible. After 1863 land remained an index of influence and the plinth on which power was erected. Although it may have been very difficult to make a plantation profitable, planters would still buy plantations and those who suffered severe losses, would still hold onto them. Both Renkema (1981a:248-52) and Hoetink (1987:152-3) agree that factors such as status played a major role in this.

After emancipation, land became an increasingly problematic issue for the Afro-Curaçaoans, exacerbated by the limited amount of fertile land available. Under the system called *paga tera* – literally: paying for the land you live on – some former slaves would remain living on the plantation, occupying the provision grounds as well as the house they had had access to during slavery. In return, they were obliged to work for free for the land owners during certain periods of the year. In many interviews this was indicated by the following: 'Ora yega tempu di aña, bo mester a traha pornada pa shon', meaning: 'When the time came, you had to work for nothing for the shon.'

Van der Gon Netscher defined the *paga tera* system as one in which 'negroes and coloured, among whom also the recently emancipated, lived on small plots they received from the land owners, in return for which they were obliged to work about twelve days per year without pay' (1868:489). He defined the system as a favour by the plantation owners to the former slaves.

In 1899 the former finance administrator J.R.G. de Veer defined *paga tera* as a system in which some former slaves remained on the plantation, receiving a piece of land and other small facilities, in return for which they would work on the plantation a few days per year (de Veer 1899:329). An informant who had lived on plantation Savaneta told Brenneker that they had to work twelve days per year without being paid, as compensation for

the land on which their house was built. These days were called the 'dia di paga ple' (days to pay your duty) and were divided into six dry days, when they had to make repairs, and six wet days when they had to plant. Only after having worked on the land of the plantation owner they could work their own land.

The paga tera system made a distinction between the way women and men would be paid for their work.

Nos hendenan tabata traha kunuku pa shon. Hende muhé tabata gana 15 sèn, miéntras hende hòmber tabata gana 30 sèn. Nan tabata yama esei 'paga tera'. Nos tabata koba buraku dos pa tres dia, despues no tin kobamentu mas. Tabatin hopi hende ta planta, pasó kunuku di shon tabata hopi grandi.⁶⁰

We would work the land for the shon. Women would get 15 cents, while men would get 30 cents. That was called paga tera (to pay for the land). We would dig holes for two to three days, and afterwards there would be no more digging. There were many people for planting as the kunuku of the shon was an enormous piece of land.

There were different variants of the paga tera system on the island. Some people remained living and working on the plantations. They were totally dependent on the will of the plantation owners to provide a piece of land for building their home and for producing their food. Some had made arrangements with the owner to have a plot to grow crops on while living elsewhere. They were less dependent on the plantation owners than the first group. There were also fishermen with a piece of land on the plantation. They had to turn in part of their catch to the owners. Sometimes the boat they fished in also belonged to the plantation owner.⁶¹

In his analysis of post-emancipation society, the sociologist Römer saw this system as a working relationship in which both parties benefited. Workers were available to the land owners when required, while the workers would have a plot to live and plant on, alongside other benefits, such as access to water and firewood. At first the paga tera system appeared to be a way for former slaves to receive a piece of land despite its scarcity, and for the planters to solve the problem of labour. In practice it remained an economic system in which the former slaves continued to be oppressed one way or the other.

The mutually dependent relationship was obviously not always as harmonious. The following dispute, three years after emancipation, occurred between a plantation owner and a 65 year old former slave named Catalina. It is also an example of the uncertainty in the relationship between planters and former slaves.⁶² In this conflict it is becoming apparent that both parties needed to adapt their attitudes to one another. Catalina had continued living on the plantation land according to the paga tera system. One day she sent her grandson to chase the birds from her own maize garden, instead of sending him to milk the land owner's sheep. When the latter questioned her about this action she was asked whether she had forgotten that according to existing custom, children living on the plantation had to help with milking the sheeps, after which they could help their family. Catalina replied with her hands on her hips, which was considered a sign of disrespect. For this, the planter gave her a cuff on the ear and demanded she leave the land before midday. While Catalina fled through the woods to Pannekoek, where some of her relatives lived, the

owner reported her act of aggression to the district master.⁶³ For her act of impudence Catalina received correctional punishment of three days imprisonment.⁶⁴ She was thus penalized in the interest of the planter.

The *paga tera* system principally benefited the land owners. The workers had access to a plot of land, as was the case during slavery, but now they had to pay for it through their labour. It also provided the plantation owners with a cheap and steady supply of workers when required. The plantation owners did not make permanent rent agreements with field workers, as it was more convenient to keep them as day labourers and to employ them only as and when needed. This was also visible in the instability of their income. Field workers would earn fifty to sixty cents when they had work. This could increase to seventy five cents or one guilder in the rainy season, with domestic servants earning eight to ten guilders a month.⁶⁵

When six months after emancipation several district commissioners related the state of affairs regarding work in their respective districts, their experiences varied. In districts with more plantations, such as the fifth, field workers were more in demand. There the commissioner complained about field workers and also about domestic servants. Both groups were accused of negligence and failing to comply with their duties.⁶⁶ In the second district, with relatively few plantations, there were no complaints about the field workers. The district master mostly complained about animal keepers and domestic servants in permanent employment. They were also considered slow and negligent.⁶⁷ The labour of animal keepers and domestic servants was constantly needed on the plantations, where they were employed permanently. Most plantations combined agriculture with animal husbandry. The milk and the meat were sold in town, while the animal hides were transported to Europe and the United States. The sheep and goat manure was exported to Barbados (Zwijnsen 1910:62).

Seferina Valks, whose father worked as an animal keeper on plantation Knip, related the following:

Mi tata tabata wak kabritu pa shon.

My father used to look after the goats of the shon.

Tur djaluna e tabata haña 6 kana di ariña di funchi.

Every Monday he would get 6 kilo's of corn meal.

E tabata gana tres yotin tambe pa siman.

In addition he earned one guilder fifty per week. Afterwards it became three fifty.

Despues esaki a bira tres sinkuenta.

With that money he raised us.

Ku e plaka ei el a kria nos.

With that money, the flour and the harvest of his own piece of land.

Ku e plaka ei, ariña di funchi i kosecha di nos mes kunuku.⁶⁸

Elderly people preferred to continue living on the plantations. For them starting a new life outside the plantation was not easy. Some had served for a very long time on the plantations. There they had their homes, their pieces of land. Sometimes they had been living on the plantation for generations. Members of their families were buried on the plantation ground, since several plantations had their own slave cemeteries. An informant told Juliana

in 1960 that she remembered how her mother used to keep up the graves on the plantation where her ancestors had been buried. They were thus accustomed to the way of life on the plantations, had their social relations there and did not welcome the prospect of moving elsewhere.

However, due to the unstable economic situation in some cases plantations changed hands regularly.⁶⁹ The death of a plantation owner or the merging of two plantations, or a plantation's acquisition by the government (due to financial problems of a planter) were likely to jeopardise the status quo. The proverb: 'shon nobo, lei nobo' (new owners, new laws) may be indicative of this.

In most cases the plantation owners determined the pattern of daily life for those living on their land. They were thus bound hand and foot. When some would request a piece of land outside the plantation where they lived and worked, the owners in question sometimes resisted their departure and did their utmost to make sure that they stayed on their plantation. By acting in this way they could depend on having a labour force at all times.⁷⁰ Leaving the plantation was seen as a way of withdrawing oneself from regular work and displaying an act of independence and autonomy.⁷¹ These people were hence refused a piece of land on the grounds of Regulation GB 23 August 1864/554, stating that individuals who already had a piece of land on a plantation and could provide a living for themselves and their family through manual labour, would be unable to rent a piece of government land.⁷² The paga tera system was clearly a way to continue exercising control over the life and labour of workers. This was confirmed in the following interview.

*Mi tabata biba na kunuku, anto ora yega tempu di aña, shon di kunuku grandi ta yama hende pa bin koba buraku. Hòmbènan ta koba buraku i muhénan ta planta. Nan ta tira pipi-ta di maishi den buraku i tapa e buraku ku tera, ku nan pia. Un dia shon Janchi a manda un karta manda bisami, tal dia ta bai koba planta, anto pa mi bai kushiná pa e hendenan. Mata kabritu kosnan ei, kushiná pa hende ku ta traha. M'a skibié manda bis'é mi no por bai, e por buska un otro hende pa manda. El a bolbe skibimi manda bisami si ta pa buska hende manda, anto t'e lo sa ku e ta buska hende manda. Awe t'ami el a manda bisa pa bai.*⁷³

I was living in the kunuku and when it was the right time of the year, the shon, owner of the large kunuku, would call on the people to come and dig holes and plant. The men would dig the holes, while the women would plant. They had to throw the maize into the holes and cover them with dirt, with their feet. One day, shon Janchi wrote me a letter to tell me that on such and such a day, people would go planting and that I had to cook for the people. A goat would be slaughtered and I would have to cook for the people. I wrote him back a letter and told him that I was not able to go and that he could look for someone else to do the job. He wrote back and told me that he was the person who can decide who to send for. Today it is me he sent for.

Another informant states:

Mi tata tabata biaha bordo di Flambechi, bordo di Zulia, Caracas, Maracaibo. E ta hasi biaha pa Maracaibo, pa Caracas, pa Merka. E ta haña un riá pa ora. P'e tempu ei ta hopi.

My father used to travel on board the 'Flambechi', the 'Zulia', the 'Caracas' and the 'Maracaibo'. He travelled to Maracaibo, Caracas and the United States. He earned one riá (fifteen

Anto ku yega tempu di aña, e shon ta bisami: 'Bo tata, e n' t'aki.' Mi tin ocho aña (a nase na 1898). Mi ta bai skol. Mi mama ta bisa: 'Mi yu, bo mester bai Punda, bai mira ku bo ta haña Pachi.' Mi ta sali, mi ta bai, mi n' por bai skol. Mi tabata bai Punda. M'a yega, nan ta bisami: 'Bo tata a sali basta ora kaba, el a laga kos na Chinè den hanchi di Punda ei.' Chinè ta bende kos ei. Mi ta bai serka Chinè i e ta bisa: 'Bo tata a laga e bònder akí pa bo.' El a laga tres plaka pa mi. Mi ta yega kas. Su manisé mi ta bai. Shon ta bisa: 'O, Adòl n' bin?' 'Nò, el a bai laman.' Tur aña e (mi tata) tin ku t'ei, no. Tur aña e t'ei traha. Dia k'e shon ei ke, e dia ei, e tin ku keda sin bai Punda p'e keda. E ku mi wela ta traha huntú. Mi wela ta pega kandela, traha kòfi, pa kada hende trahadó ku bini. Riba e dia ei hopi hende ta traha pa shon. Dia di koba, di planta, bo ta haña hendenan ta koba, planta.⁷⁴

cents) per hour. In those days it was much. When the time of year arrived, the planter would tell me: your father is not here. I was eight years old then (I was born in 1898) and was going to school. My mother would tell me, son, you have to go to town, and see if you find Pachi. I would go then and could not go to school. I wanted to go to school, but could not. When I reached town, the people would tell me: 'Your father left hours ago and left some things for you at Chinè...' Chinè was a vendor in one of the alleys in town. I would go there and Chinè would tell me. Your father left this bag for you. He left fifteen cents. I go home. The next day, the planter would ask me 'Oh! Adòl is not coming, is he?' 'No, he went sailing.' Every year my father had to be ready. He had to work for the planter. When the owner wanted him to be there he could not go to the town, but had to stay back. He and my grandmother would work together. My grandmother would light the fire and make coffee for all the workers. On that day many people worked for the land owner. On the day of digging holes and planting, you will find the people digging and planting.

The power of plantation owners was often exercised in an arbitrary way. There is evidence of conflict in the relationship between land owners and workers. The reality of the paga tera system varied according to the personality of the owner. For instance, on certain plantations the workers were not allowed to dance the tambú while on others this was not considered a problem. In 1870 on plantation Porto Mari people held a celebration with drumming after they had finished building their home⁷⁵, while in 1874 on plantation Santa Cruz, the fitó was caught in a fight with a tambú player when he wanted to stop the feast.⁷⁶

When individuals failed to abide by the rules of the plantation they were given 'ora di porta': an order to leave the plantation within 24 hours.⁷⁷ Plantation owners feared that such people would incite others and be a 'bad example' (*siña mal ehèmpel*). Such was the case, for instance, with Saxen, the slave of N. Rojer. After emancipation he remained on the plantation of Wacao, where he was in charge of the horses. In his request to the district master for a piece of land Saxen claimed that he was forced to leave the plantation.

During the usual investigations for the request, the district master found out that Saxen had complained to the owner that some of his animals had destroyed his maize garden. Due to this complaint the owner had given him two days to leave the plantation.⁷⁸

Someone who had been chased from the land and was thought impudent, would not easily find a piece of land to live on.⁷⁹ In 1892, thirty years after the end of slavery, the finance administrator described the ora di porta rule to the governor as a relic of the slavery period. According to him, the plantation owners still saw blacks as the descendants of

those who had once been their property and demanded unconditional subordination from them. ‘They would allow them to live on their land on their conditions. When they saw fit, they could ban an entire family from their land without prior warning, leaving the family unemployed and homeless.’⁸⁰

The *ora di porta* rule was described by an informant as follows:

*Ora shon bisabo traha bo tin ku traha. Un dia, mi ta spera yu, un anochi mi mester a bai traha den saliña pa koba salu. E dia siguiente, e doño a manda un karta i a eksigí pa mi bin bua salu den dia tambe. Mi a manda bis'é ku mi no por bini. El a dunami 24 ora, 'ora di porta'. Mi a keda sin bai, anto mi no a bua salu mas.*⁸¹

If the shon orders you to do work, you have to work. One night, when I was pregnant, I had to work on the salt-pans and dig salt. The following day, the owner wrote me a letter and demanded me to come and dig salt during the day as well. I sent to tell him that I could not go. They gave me 24 hours' notice. I didn't go and did not dig salt anymore.

Or, as Carlos Koeiman pointed out:

(Pasó mi tata no tabat'ei tempu di aña) shon a lanta ku mi tata. Ma, e shon ta (bata riba) ku mi tanta, ruman di mi mama, ma e n' tene konsiderashon ku nos. El a saka nos fo'i su kunuku.

(Because my father was not there in time for planting) the shon went against him. Even though the planter lived together with my aunt, the sister of my mother, he was not considerate towards us. He chased us from his kunuku.

Some plantations continued to apply the same labour routines as during slavery. On one plantation in the western part of the island, they continued to ring the bell to announce the work.

S.V.: *Nan ta bati klòk 6 or di mainta. Tur mainta. Bo mester ta trempan. Si bo hera yega lat, shon ta birabo, mandabo bèk. No ta pèrmitíbo traha mas.*

S.V.: *They used to ring the bell at six o'clock in the morning. Every morning. You had to be there in time. If you happened to be late, the shon would send you back. You would not be allowed to work anymore.*

R.A.: *Kuantu aña señora tabatin?*

R.A.: *How old were you at that time?*

S.V.: *Un 17 pa 18 aña*

S.V.: *About 17 or 18 years old*

R.A.: *Orashon manda un hende bèk, e por keda riba plantashi?*

R.A.: *When the shon sends a person back, is he allowed to stay on the plantation?*

S.V.: *Nò, nò, nò. E ta kore ku nan, saka nan for di su kurá. Anto tin hende ta hui, despues bini bèk. Ku shon haña sa, pasó tin hasidó di redu, ku e haña sa e ta bolbe manda e hende ei bèk. Esei ta e tempunan ayá. Awor akí no. Aworakí no tin e kosnan ei.*⁸³

S.V.: *No, no no. He will chase them from the plantation. Sometimes the person would run away and return. But when the shon gets to know that, because there are gossipers, if he gets to know, he would chase him out again. Those were different days. Now that cannot happen anymore. Nowadays these things don't happen.*

Up until the early twentieth century the paga tera system continued to exist in the western part of the island. In the eastern part it had all but disappeared due to a large distribution of government land. In addition, the town was close by, and the mining industry was also found there, offering employment prospects to the manumitted former slaves. The paga tera system was attacked by the Dutch socialist van Kol, particularly on account of the working conditions (van Kol 1904:304). Whereas van der Gon Netscher in 1869 considered the system a favour to the black population, van Kol, who visited the island at the beginning of the twentieth century, saw it as a legacy of slavery. He gave a detailed description of the system in that period, which had not changed over the years. He noted that:

On some plantations pieces of land were given out on which the black population built their huts and planted maize. Sometimes they had to work 10 to 12 days a year without payment from the land owner or three days a week with a compensation of 15 cents per day. The salary would also be paid in maize. In addition, the farmer had to give all the maize stalks to the land owner, which often meant handing over the entire harvest as in drought years no maize would ripen on these stalks (van Kol 1904:308).

The land owners' commitment to rigid control over the farmers' time and mobility generated deep hostility among the people, who had expected independence after freedom. The following statement shows that some did not see any difference between the pre- and post-slavery period. It also reveals that former slaves, both men and women, saw field labour as something degrading.

Bo ta hende grandi, bo ta traha pa fitó. Fitó ta mucha. Bo por ta su tata. Awor akí nos no tin e kosnan ei mas na Kòrsou pasó Shell a bini.

You are an adult and you are working for the fitó (overseer). The fitó is young. You could be his father. Now we don't have that kind of things in Curaçao any longer, because of the Shell (oil-refinery).

Shell a bini, para tur e sufrimentunan ei, para sklabbitu na Kòrsou. Bo por kere un hende ta piki su chapi seis or di mainta, banda di ocho or e ta kome un poko funchi, banda di dos or i sinku or di atardi tambe, traha, chapi te seis or... Esei ta traha manera katibu.⁸⁴

The Shell came and stopped all this suffering, stopped slavery on Curaçao. Can you believe that someone will pick up a hoe from six o'clock in the morning to work and about eight o'clock he will eat some funchi, about two o'clock in afternoon and five o'clock again and work with the hoe till six o'clock... That is slavery.

Often they criticized the land owners controlling the system, because they paid them no respect.

E shonnan, bosa nan ta tratabo ku menospresio, pasó bo ta pover. No e manera ku Dios tabata ke pa ta, pero ta asina nan ta tratabo. Kastigábo, abusá di bo, bo mester keda sumiso, bo tata mester keda sumiso, bo mama mester keda sumiso. Bo mester dominá bo mes, pasó asina e shonnan ta.⁸⁵

The land owners, you know, they treat you with disdain, because you are poor. That is not the way God meant it to be, but that's the way they treat us. Punish you, abuse you, you have to be subservient, your father must be subservient, your mother must be subservient. You must control your temper. That is how the land owners were.

The power of the plantation owners extended to the workers' children. Many were held back due to this, as an informant (born 1908) interviewed in 1992 recalls.

E.Q.: *Mi a nase na plantashi Siberie. Mi tata tabata wak baka pa shon. Mi a nase bou dominio di shon. Nan tabata hende ku hopi poder. Nos a bai skol na Wilibròdu. Bida tabata duru. Mi tambe tabata wak baka den kunuku huntu ku mi tata. Shon tabatin hopi poder. Nan a eksigí pa mi kita skol promé ku mi tempu pa mi traha na nan lugá na Otrobanda.*

R.A.: *Traha komo kiko?*

E.Q.: *Traha komo nan kriá. Mi a kere ku si mi bai Punda(stat), nan ta mandami skol. Despues mi a kuminsá yora i mi no tabata ker a keda serka e shon. E shon a bisami, nò, bo tin ku keda. Mi a bai, bai traha serka un bas di karpinté. Despues mi a bai for di e isla.⁸⁶*

E.Q.: *I was born on the plantation Siberie. My father used to look after the cattle for the shon. I grew up under the control of the shon. These were people with a lot of power. We went to school in Willibrordus. Life was very hard. I also used to look after the cattle together with my father in the kunuku. The shon had a lot of power. They demanded that I left school before time so that I could work at their place in town (Otrobanda).*

R.A.: *To work as what?*

E.Q.: *To work as a servant. I thought when I went to work in town, that they would send me to school. Afterwards I started to cry and did not want to stay with the shon. The shon told me no, I had to stay. I left and went to work in the workshop of a carpenter. Afterwards I left the island.*

One recurrent theme on plantation life was the relationship between the shons and the women living on their plantations. According to oral history the shons sought young women on their plantations. If the parents refused they would be sent away from the plantations. It was often a topic of gossip. Some Afro-Curaçaoan women preferred to gain from being a white man's concubine rather than being a black men's wife, as the offspring would reap the benefit of having a lighter skin colour.

I.S.: *Shon Manchi e no a kasa anto, e tabatin yu afó. E ta kuenan, ma famia no ta kuenan komo famia. Ta afó e tin nan.*

R.A.: *Yu ku muhé pretu*

I.S.: *Pasó un shon ta haña un yu ku un negru, e no ta presentá komo tata. Abo muhé ta sa, ku tal hende ta tata di e yu. Pero e no ta presentá manera nos negru por presentá, anke nos no ta kria yu, ma nos ta presentá.⁸⁷*

I.S.: *Shon Manchi never married, but he had children out of wedlock. He recognized them, but his family did not recognize them as family members. They were born out of wedlock.*

R.A.: *He had a child with a black woman?*

I.S.: *The shon gets a child with a black person, he does not come out as the father. You being the woman will know that such and such a person is the father of the child. But he will not come out as the father as we blacks would do. Even though we don't take care of the child, we will come out as its father.*

The following informant also gave an example of such a relationship between a plantation owner and a worker.

S.V.: *Na kunuku di shon tabatin diferente hende muhé. Bo tabatin Petra, Anna, bo tabatin Eva, ku tabatin yu ku shon (informante ta hari). Shon tabata gusta muhé. El a rekonosé e muchanan. E tabatin yu ku un muhé ku yama Mercelina. Despues el a bai biba na un otro kunuku ku un otro muhé. El a haña nuebe yu kuné. El a lubidá Mercelina. Nan a kant'é den un kantika:*

*Shon a planta bonchi
Pa Mercelin bin kue bonchi
Ma Terecilia kabes di buriku
A bin kue bonchi mata rama.⁸⁸*

S.V.: *On the plantation you had several women. You had Petra, Ann, you had Eve, who had children with the owner. (The informant laughs). This is shon Harry (laughter). Shon was good for himself. He did recognize those children. He also had children by a lady named Merceline. Then he went to live on another plantation together with another woman. He got nine children by her. The other woman Merceline was forgotten. They sang this 'story' in a song:
The shon has planted beans
For Merceline to come and pick beans⁸⁹
But Terecila, she with the donkey head⁹⁰
Came to pick the beans and killed the bush.⁹¹*

One of the advantages of living on the plantations under the paga tera system was that people would have better access to water, sometimes very difficult to attain, as there were often periods of drought on the island. In 1868, people living in town were dying of dehydration as even the 'donkeys and mules were too weak to bring water to the town' (Brenneker 1986:120-1). In 1883 a priest wrote that sometimes people would pay 20 to 30 cents – a daily wage – for a small tub of water.⁹² A similar phenomenon is also described in the beginning of the twentieth century. In the dry season the price of rainwater – in an ordinary year five to ten cents for a tub of 18 litres – rose to 25/30 cents for the same quantity (Blink 1907:56). Priests would ask the government and others for help, as those in the countryside in particular would suffer from the lack of water.⁹³ Even into the twentieth century pure drinking water was difficult to attain and expensive in Curaçao. The lack of which was one of the major causes for the high infant mortality rate (Dekker 1982:217).

One of the major complaints made of the paga tera system concerned the lack of drinking water. The daily struggle by Afro-Curaçaoans centered as much on water as it did on land and food. The search for water was a major preoccupation and took a great deal of time and energy. Many stories were told about the hardships of collecting water. People, especially young children, would often have to walk several kilometres to collect water. This could be a dangerous task, especially for children; drownings were not unknown.⁹⁴

The following informant, born in 1900 on plantation Kenepa, stressed that even though he lived under the paga tera system, he was unable to find drinking water easily. The plantation owner allowed his cattle to pollute the water and it was sometimes full of cow dung and urine.

Ora mi ta bai skol bini, mi mama ta mandami bai saka awa na tanki di awa. Mama ta bisami: 'Bai saka poko awa, anto mi ta tota dos maishi warda pa bo.' Kontentu mi ta bai, pasó mi kier men, mi tin chèn di haña maishi. Den e tankinan di awa, e bakanan di shon tabata bai bebe awa. E bakanan sa bai kana bai te meimei di

When I came back from school in the afternoon, my mother would send me to fetch water from the tank. Mother would say: 'Go and fetch water and I will toast some maize for you.' I would be very glad to go, because I would get some maize in return. But... the cows of the landlord would go into the tank where we took

awa, anto bai para pishi. Ora mi saka e awa, mi ta mira mitar di e awa, kasi bèrdè, puru pishi. Duele. Un kos asina ei no ta pasa awor. Mi ta bisa nan na kas, anto defuntu mi tata ta siñami kòrta kadushi, anto pone den awa, bir'é, bir'é, bir'é. E ta kria lèbèlèbè, traga ta sali un tiki ku nos por beb'é. Ta esei t'awa. N' ta'tin otro kaminda. I tòg tabatin pos den kurá di shon. Tur loke t'eiden ta di shon. Bo n' por papia nada, tampoko. Bon, despues ku kos a bira di remate, anto a bai pidi shon pa bai kue poko awa. Nos a bin traha un baki parti pafó di tranké, ku hende por a bai kue. Ma tin biaha bientu n' ta supla i bo ta haña 10 hende ei. Un mester para warda riba otro. Mir'akí!!! Si bo n' ta pasa den malu, bo n' ta sa kon malu ta. Awor mi ta rekonosé e kos, m'a e dia nos ta den e kos nos mes n' ta ripará.⁹⁵

our water and urinate inside. When we would fetch the water, it would be green..., pure piss. Very pitiful. Something like that could not happen nowadays. When I arrived home, I would tell them and my father, may God rest his soul, would teach us to cut a cactus, put it in the water, turn and turn and turn it. It would become like a slimy matter, the dirt would go into the slime and the water would remain clean, so that we could drink it. That was the water we had. There was no other place. And still on the land of the shon, there were a lot of wells. But everything belonged to the shon. Well it became unbearable. We went to ask the shon permission to fetch water in his yard. They built a water reservoir outside the yard where people could fetch water. But sometimes there would be no wind and ten people would be waiting for their turn to fetch water. Look here. If you haven't experienced bad life, you don't know what a bad life is. Now we do recognize this life, but when we were in the middle of it, we ourselves did not recognize it.

Conclusion

With the end of slavery, so ended the legal slave status of Afro-Curaçaoans. The colonial State now had jurisdiction over these freedpeople. Officially the State played a more pronounced and instrumental role in shaping the legal framework for social relationships. The social reality of emancipation was more complicated than merely recognizing the legal freedom of people. The change of perception within the white population which this also implied was long in coming.

The laws and regulations put in place were concerned with far more than simply regulating the social life of people. Plantation owners continued to assert control over the lives of people both in a direct and an indirect way. For many years they had direct domination over the lives of those who continued in the paga tera system, whereby the latter worked and lived on the plantation ground. In addition, as most of these planters had executive functions in governmental institutions as well, they could indirectly control the lives of a large part of the Afro-Curaçaoan population.

In the area of work, their interests were important considerations in the implementation of laws. The State then became a prime instrument in maintaining labour discipline. The rules enforced were dominated by the racist ideas prevalent at the time, which assumed that Afro-Curaçaoans were unable to deal with freedom and to be successful, free citizens.

The power of the plantation owners also affected the land distribution among Afro-Curaçaoans. The different regulations regarding land and land distribution were aimed at instilling a labour discipline and orderly behaviour among Afro-Curaçaoans. In the distribution of land the plantation owners' power was also felt, as the application for a piece of land could be refused based on their judgement of the applicant's character. In this way control over the distribution of land was used as a disciplinary device.

As the twentieth century approached, the power of the plantation owners began to diminish. However, the State did not succeed in de-institutionalizing the existing social inequality based on ethnic and racial differences – if it indeed attempted to do so in the first place.

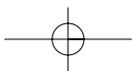
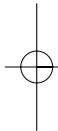
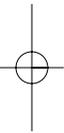
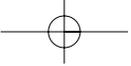
Notes

- 1 NatAr, Publicatie Blad A 1863, no. 11.
- 2 NatAr, Publicatie Blad A 1863, no. 23.
- 3 NatAr, Publicatie Blad A 1863, no. 17.
- 4 NatAr, Publicatie Blad A 1863, no. 18.
- 5 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, 1863-1904, inv. no. 125, 17-5-1863.
- 6 NA, Ministerie van Koloniën, 1850-1900, inv. no. 6739, 20-1-1864.
- 7 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 2e district, 1863-1905, inv. no. 140, 5 -3-1866/9.
- 8 NatAr, Publicatie Blad 1862/15, Article 21; 'Wet houdende opheffing der slavernij op de eilanden Curaçao, Bonaire, Aruba, Sint Eustatius, Saba en Sint Maarten (Nederlands gedeelte)'.
- 9 NatAr, Publicatie Blad 1863/18; 'Wet tot wering van lediggang en zwerverij'.
- 10 NA, Ministerie van Koloniën, 1850-1900, inv. no. 6734, 31-12-1862/906.
- 11 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, 1863-1904, inv. no. 127, 1-10-1867/143.
- 12 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 2e district, 1863-1905, inv. no. 140, 5 -3-1866/9. See minutes of meeting 24-11-1909 of the Commission appointed by the government (30-7-1909/489) to investigate the situation of large-scale farming in the colony of Curaçao (*Koloniaal Verslag* 1910).
- 13 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, 1863-1904, inv. no. 126, 13-5-1866/83. See also NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 3e district, 1863-1906, inv. no. 139, 22-5-1864/54).
- 14 NatAr, Publicatie Blad 1863/18, Article 4.
- 15 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 3e district, 1863-1906, inv. no. 139, 28-5-1864/58.
- 16 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Administratie van Financiën, 1892, inv. no. 37, 18-5-1892/215 and 14-5-1892/212.
- 17 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Rol van Strafzaken 1873, Procesverbaal no. 31.
- 18 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Rol van Strafzaken 1872, Procesverbaal no. 32.
- 19 NatAr, Publicatie Blad 1863/17.
- 20 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, 1863-1904, inv. no. 126, 6-2-1865/8.
- 21 Idem. The district master said to have taken this action after having received a letter from the government dated 11-5-1866/190, stating that all those not behaving properly on Pannekoek and

- Dokterstuin (plantation grounds which had recently been purchased by the government), would be removed.
- 22 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 4e district, 1863-1906, inv. no. 147, 6-1-1864/2, 14-1-1864/ 4, 17-3-1864/22, 13-4-1864/26 and 27-5-1864/34.
 - 23 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 3e district, 1863-1906, inv. no. 139, 9-1-1864/3.
 - 24 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 4e district, 1863-1906, inv. no. 3698, 19-9-1863.
 - 25 NA, Ministerie van Koloniën, 1850-1900, inv. no. 6784, 22-6-1886/386.
 - 26 NatAr, Publicatie Blad 1865/12 ('Wet houdende strafbepaling tegen niet naleving der verplichtingen bij huur van dienst').
 - 27 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 2e district, 1863-1905, inv. no. 133, 26-5-1865.
 - 28 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, 1863-1904, inv. no. 126, 26-5-1866/45 and 28-5-1866/47.
 - 29 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, 1863-1904, inv. no. 126, 16-6-1866/87. See also NA, Ministerie van Koloniën, 1850-1900, inv. no. 6787, 18-1-1889/42.
 - 30 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Administratie van Financiën, 1892, inv. no. 36, 11-12-1894/16.
 - 31 Even plantations owners were suspected of selling illicit alcohol on their plantations, as a way of making an additional income. NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Administratie van Financiën, 1892, inv. no. 37, 16-9-1893/381.
 - 32 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Geheime stukken, 1861-1880, inv. no. 3659, 17-7-1866/4, 19-7-1866/no number, 19-7-1877/55 and 20-7-1866/18.
 - 33 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Geheime stukken, 1861-1880, inv. no. 3659, 19-7-1866/55.
 - 34 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, 1863-1904, inv. no. 127, 1-10-1867/143.
 - 35 Renkema 1981a:157. In 1883 Eskildsen was district master of the fourth district and from 1884-1892 the fifth district also became his responsibility.
 - 36 Brenneker 1970:1836. Many people complained that their animals had been stolen. As the animals of land owners had a mark in each ear, and theirs in only one ear, their animals could easily be taken by the land owners.
 - 37 For example, it was only in 1868, when the civil code came into force, that the commissioners were given better guidelines on civil matters (see Burgerlijk Wetboek voor Curaçao, KB, 4-9-1868/18; NatAr, Publicatie Blad 1868/76.)
 - 38 *Amigoe*, 10-9-1904.
 - 39 The *benta* is a musical instrument in the form of a bow. The player uses his mouth as a sound box, while constantly changing the position of a knife on the string.
 - 40 'Jansofat' is the name of a plantation.
 - 41 NatAr, Parket van den Procureur-generaal, inv. no. 484, 28-5-1911.
 - 42 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Ingekomen stukken 3e district, 1860-1905, inv. no. 53, 4-2-1902.
 - 43 Interview Eduardo Tokaai (born 1899), Allen, 12-9-1984 (NatAr).
 - 44 This also led to discussions in the Dutch House of Commons revolving around the possible sale of Curaçao, as a result of which the Colonial Council became very alarmed. Renkema 1976.
 - 45 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 2e district, 1863-1905, inv. no. 132, 26-3-1873/48.
 - 46 This is derived from the Dutch word 'marechaussee'.
 - 47 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, 1863-1904, inv. no. 126, 19-1-1866/1.

- 48 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Ingekomen stukken 3e district, 1860-1905, inv. no. 36, 27-11-1866/442.
- 49 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 3e district, 1863-1906, inv. no. 140, 29-11-1866/97.
- 50 NA, Ministerie van Koloniën, 1850-1900, inv. no. 6747, 16-5-1872/220.
- 51 Interview Henriette Cooks (born 1877), Brenneker/Juliana, 1958 (Zikinzá-collection, T 766, NatAr).
- 52 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, 1863-1904, inv. no. 126, 2 -5-1865/61; see the case of the marechaussee who was so drunk that he stripped off his clothes (NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, 1863-1904, inv. no. 126, 7-5-1866/54 and 15-5-1866/58).
- 53 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, 1863-1904, inv. no. 127, 26-10-1866/162.
- 54 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 2e district, 1863-1905, inv. no. 131, 29-7-1864/76.
- 55 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 3e district, 1863-1906, inv. no. 140, 27-12-1866.
- 56 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 2e en 3e district, inv. no. 164, 14-9-1908/294; NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 2e en 3e district, inv. no. 164, 24-9-1908/299.
- 57 *La Cruz*, 4-9-1918.
- 58 De Pool 1935:81.
- 59 Interview Virginia (Ina) Servinia (born 1-10-1910), Allen, 27-11-1986 (NatAr).
- 60 Interview Seferina Valks (born 1903), Allen, 8-9-1983 (NatAr).
- 61 Van Dissel 1868:443-4. For example, part of the work force on plantation Koraal Tabak (at the bay of Sint Joris in the eastern part of the island) focused on fishing.
- 62 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, 1863-1904, inv. no. 126, 29 -1-1866/9. This manifested itself in several ways. For example, the owner of the plantation of Ascension complained to the district master that she felt insulted as she had been answered back in a disrespectful way by a woman called Margaritha living in Dokterstuin, after her cart had collided on a narrow road with her when she was taking products to town. Margaritha lost large part of her produce and was punished for her verbal insult. NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, 1863-1904, inv. no. 126, 7-3-1866/23.
- 63 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, 1863-1904, inv. no. 126, 29-1-1866/9 and 31-1-1866/11.
- 64 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, 1863-1904, inv. no. 126, 2-2-1866/14.
- 65 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 2e district, 1863-1905, inv. no. 131, 25-5-1864/27.
- 66 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, 1863-1904, inv. no. 125, 12-1-1864/2 and 13-5-1864/21.
- 67 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 2e district, 1863-1905, inv. no. 131, 13-5-1864/21.
- 68 Interview Seferina Valks (born 1903 in Kenepa), Allen, 8-9-1983 (NatAr).
- 69 After 1863 several plantations were sold in an auction by the 'Weeskamer' or by the Curaçaoan mortgage bank: Klein Kwartier (in 1868), Groot Davelaar (in 1870), Stenen Koraal (in 1882), Daniel and Grote Berg (in 1886) and Engelenberg (in 1898). In the same period Wacao, Lelienberg, Sint Hieronimus and Paradera (in 1878) and Valentijn (in 1894) were auctioned by a private loan holder (Renkema 1981a:186).
- 70 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 2e district, 1863-1905, inv. no. 132, 16-5-1867/1.

- 71 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, 1863-1904, inv. no. 126, 6-8-1864/83.
- 72 NA, Ministerie van Koloniën, 1850-1900, inv. no. 6739, 23-8-1864/554. This land was owned by the government to be distributed among the popular class. The State began to buy pieces of land from plantation owners in anticipation of emancipation.
- 73 Interview N. Simmons (born 1888), Allen, 15-1-1980 (NatAr).
- 74 Interview Carlos Koeiman (born 1898), Allen, 6-5-1986 (NatAr).
- 75 NatAr, Hof van Justitie, PV 1870.
- 76 NatAr, Hof van Justitie, PV 1874.
- 77 Sometimes people would go and live on a different plantation after having been chased away from their homes. For example, Leontina was chased away from San Juan and went to live on Groot Santa Marta. As she and her son continued to misbehave, they were again chased away from that plantation. NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, 1863-1904, inv. no. 126, 16-6-1865/87.
- 78 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, 1863-1904, inv. no. 126, 9-6-1865/76.
- 79 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, 1863-1904, inv. no. 125, 15-7-1864/70. Angelista Pieter was sent away from a plantation, but was also denied a piece of land because she was impudent. See also the case of the couple Johannes and Balentina Schoop, who in the beginning of the twentieth century (1903) were denied a piece of government land, after having been chased away from the plantation, based on the same criterion. NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district 1863-1904, inv. no. 145, 12-3-1903/31.
- 80 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Administratie van Financiën, 1892, inv. no. 37, 18-5-1892/215 and 14-5-1892/212.
- 81 Interview N. Simmons (born 1888), Allen, 15-1-1980 (NatAr).
- 82 Interview Carlos Koeiman (born 1898), Allen, 25-5-1986 (NatAr).
- 83 Interview Seferina Valks (born 1903), Allen, 8-5-1984 (NatAr).
- 84 Interview Felix Martina (born 21-2-1894), Brenneker/Juliana, 28-3-1978 (T 62, Fundashon Biblioteka Públiko Kòrsou).
- 85 Interview Eduardo Tokaai (born 1899), Allen, August 1985 (NatAr).
- 86 Interview E. Quirindongo (born 14-10-1908), Allen, 1992 (NatAr).
- 87 Interview Inie Sirvanie (born 1-4-1910), Allen, 27-11-1989 (NatAr).
- 88 Interview Seferina Valks (born 1903), Allen, 8-5-1984 (NatAr).
- 89 The shon had children with Merceline.
- 90 She was called *kabes di buriku*, donkey head, due to her big head. Despite this feature the shon was willing to form a couple with her.
- 91 The former woman disappeared from his memory.
- 92 Kerstgeschenk 1883:215.
- 93 *La Union*, 12-6-1889 and 29-5-1889. See also NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Ingekomen stukken 3e district, 1860-1905, inv. no. 42, 8-5-1889/268.
- 94 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, 1863-1904, inv. no. 127, 1-4-1867/53.
- 95 Interview Didi Sluis (born 1904), Allen/Ernest Gaari, 14-4-1984 (NatAr).



CHAPTER VI

The Roman Catholic Church's Effort to Instill Respectability

Introduction

At the time of emancipation the Roman Catholic Church was a primary institution exercising authority and control over the lives of Afro-Curaçaoans. As previously stated, after Niewindt's arrival in 1824 on the island the Church's missionary efforts broadened. By the mid-nineteenth century the Church had successfully established its position as a driving force in the lives of the enslaved and the freed black population. As can be seen in Table 6.1, in 1860, three years before emancipation, the number of people baptized as Roman Catholics on Curaçao, both enslaved and freed, was already over 16,000, constituting around 85 per cent of the total population.¹

Table 6.1 Total Number of Baptisms, First Communions and Marriages in 1860

Parish	Total Catholics	Baptism	First Communion	Marriage
Santa Ana	9,000	315	2,371	26
Santa Rosa	3,300	135	1,056	24
Santa Maria	2,600	68	690	17
Sint Jozef	2,700	78	640	9
Sint Wilibrordus	1,000	64	218	2
Sint Petrus	1,000	47	234	4
Total	16,900	707	5,209	82

Source: Kerkelijke Courant, 'Katholieke Nederlandsche stemmen over godsdienst, staat-, geschied- en letterkunde', no. 291, vol. 28, 26-7-1862

The Church thus gained a firm basis in island society, with the congregations worshipping at six churches spread across the island, led by fourteen priests and assistant priests.²

The Church functioned on two levels. One was the conversion of 'heathens' and people of other religious beliefs. The other was teaching Roman Catholic doctrine and rituals, which also entailed a change in the mindset of those converted. The Church endeavoured to adapt the values, norms and attitudes of blacks, believing these to be remnants of African cultures and of the slave system. This, they subsumed under the concept of civilization.

Over time, the Roman Catholic Church evaluated its effort to civilize not only upon its successes but also on the hardship, doubt and frustration encountered while fulfilling its mission. There is little written information regarding the response of the Afro-Curaçaoans to the missionary work. In which ways were they susceptible to this conversion? What role did Catholicism play in their identity-formation and self-perception?

In this Chapter I will discuss the ways in which the Roman Catholic Church influenced the behaviour patterns of Afro-Curaçaoans following emancipation. In the first section I will focus on how the Church used the concept of 'civilization' to implement its missionary work, and how this was based on preconceived ideas and images regarding Afro-Curaçaoans. I will then give an overview of the strategies employed by the Church to control the social life Afro-Curaçaoans. Finally, I will look at how Church and Afro-Curaçaoans interacted and I will analyse the various ways in which the latter responded to the different forms of control introduced by the Church.

Respectability from a Missionary Perspective

After 1863 the Roman Catholic Church continued its missionary activities among Afro-Curaçaoans. Emancipation actually facilitated this task. The Afro-Curaçaoans' new freedom gave them the opportunity to become more active in Church matters. In 1862 the priest B.Th.J. Frederiks expanded on this in a letter, writing that 'no doubt, there will be great opportunities ahead for our Holy religion, due to our emancipation of the enslaved. May God provide sufficient priests to teach them and to embrace a divine life, because most of them are ignorant, and as a result live an immoral life.'³ In his letter dated 20 June 1863, to be read aloud to the freedpeople, the then vicar apostolic Kistemaker set out this message and related that 'no longer could they use their position as enslaved as an excuse for non participation in Church activities'.⁴

In the time leading up to emancipation the colonial government began to recognize the work of the Roman Catholic missionaries: it appealed to the Church to help maintain public order among the soon to be freed population (Latour 1945:68). The members of the elite class became preoccupied with this change in the social order, believing that blacks were volatile and would be prone to violence once freed. The Church, however, was of a different opinion, as Kistemaker emphasized in the previously mentioned letter: 'Neither do we think it is necessary to urge you in your desire for freedom to behave "quietly and peacefully". After all, thank God that in this colony we do not know of any revolt or resistance against the legal authority.'⁵ This letter was read aloud in all churches on the island on the first Sunday after having been received as well as on Emancipation day.

In their evaluation of that day, priests made sure to emphasize the success of their mission by stating that freedom had been received without violence. The clergy were proud of the fact that on 1 July 1863 all Catholic churches on the island had been full of people and that during the celebrations, which continued over several days, there had been no 'killing, plundering, vengeance, or any other irregularity' (Latour 1945:68). In his retrospective Latour underscored this as proof of the effectiveness of the Roman Catholic Church's civilizing mission (Latour 1955:9).

With freedom, the Catholic priests believed their presence to be more essential than ever. They compared the behaviour of those freed in 1863 with those freed previously and concluded that the former group was more receptive to religious beliefs and conversion. They considered that: 'They were guided by religion, and in spite of their weakness every individual behaved like a free child of God' (Latour 1952:20). However, in the period following emancipation, the Church frequently feared that Afro-Curaçaoans would regress into what it termed an 'uncivilized' state. In 1875 the priest M.M. Jansen, on his arrival on the island with two other priests, expressed this anxiety:

For most of these unfortunates, virtue seems to be a vice and sin to be something good. So easily, they leave the path of virtue in order to commit wicked acts. We nevertheless hope that this situation will change and that these poor souls, entrusted to us, will reform themselves and become more virtuous.⁶

A decade later, faced with an overwhelming feeling of frustration, another priest would express similar ideas regarding a certain community over which the Church had little control. This community was situated near that of Sint Willibrordus, on a piece of land named 'Mondi afó (popularly also called 'tera di misa': the land of the Church), 'kurá di pastor' (the yard of the priest) or 'kurá di mishon' (mission yard)). It was one of the first plots of land that Niewindt received from the government in order to build a church and a school (Latour 1940:7):

If Christianity had not exerted its benevolent influence on the island, a whole population would have become like animals. Fortunately, the Church still has priests who just as the disciples and other preachers before them are willing to leave everything and spread the gospel among the heathens, to light the flame of faith in the hearts of those who dwell in darkness.⁷ [Translation R.M. Allen]

The essential aim of the Church's civilizing mission was to turn Afro-Curaçaoans into 'hende drechi' (decent/respectable people) or 'un bon katólíko' (a good Catholic person) – decent people according to the Roman Catholic model. Their interpretation was based on the way they saw working class people in their own societies, coupled with their perceptions of people from non-European cultures, whom they believed to be on the lowest evolutionary scale. The Church was critical of elements in the social behaviour of Afro-Curaçaoans which it believed required change. The missionaries' assessment of the characteristics of Afro-Curaçaoans also influenced the ways in which they proceeded with this civilizing process.

In the previously mentioned emancipation letter, Kistemaker addressed some of the flaws considered inherent in Afro-Curaçaoans. Examples cited were a tendency towards idleness and a lack of work discipline. Therefore Kistemaker described work discipline as a religious activity and he associated laziness with sinful behaviour, punishable by the State and above all by God.⁸ The missionaries would continue to reaffirm this observation in whatever form they could. The Church also paid special attention to marriage and family life. The western model of marriage was highly valued as an important instrument in the

civilizing process. Kistemaker's letter, read aloud on the day of emancipation, placed heavy emphasis on marriage and monogamy in association with moral behaviour.

In the years following emancipation negative stereotyping of Afro-Curaçaoans would increase, while the Church persisted and remained committed to its civilizing mission. The clergy defined civilization as 'the refinement of a population, the evolution from a state of wildness to religious, moral and scientific formation and education' (Euwens 1906:48). When the priest-historian Euwens refuted the views of a critic who was denying the civilizing role of the Catholic Church by stating that Afro-Curaçaoans remained uncivilized, he retorted that 'Where on earth will one find a people who after fifty years of missionary work are so docile, have so much love for work, are so loyal to the laws of the country and so orderly and disciplined, if not on the islands of Curaçao, Aruba and Bonaire?' (1906:48).

Over time the Roman Catholic Church would denounce as immoral certain cultural rituals which persisted among Afro-Curaçaoans. De Pool (1935) gives an overview of what were believed to be such negative African customs. De Pool was a devoted Catholic who wrote several articles on cultural development during the 1930s. He believed that through the efforts of the Catholic clergy African customs, such as the previously mentioned eight-day ceremony called 'ocho dia' – held during eight consecutive nights following a burial, leading to a concluding ceremony on the last day – were dying out in the first half of the twentieth century.⁹ De Pool was clear in his negative view of the ocho dia and pointed out that: 'We should undoubtedly be grateful to the Catholic Church, which through its zeal, perseverance and preaching has made this half barbarism called ocho dia disappear' (1935:63). His statement has proved to be incorrect, as this custom, along with others, persists until the present day. It does, however, give us an idea of perceptions existing at the time regarding these customs.

De Pool continues to describe the ocho dia as 'a mixture of African superstition and Catholic ceremony, mixed with some witchcraft, and something more uncivilized than the highly criticized tambú' (1935:63). He was also appreciative of the Catholic Church for having eradicated the *seú*, which was celebrated during the maize harvest: 'Thanks to the Catholic Mission, that has always aimed at uplifting the morality of our population, such a noisy, scandalous ceremony called *seú*, which has always ended in bloody fighting, drunkenness and disorder, has disappeared' (1935:77).

In a sense de Pool was wrong, as the Church was not against all elements of the *seú*: the *wapamentu*, the marching in a particular style, was accepted. During the *wapamentu* those who had cut and gathered the maize, together with others living nearby, would dance in a procession from the fields to the storage depots called 'mangasina', while singing songs in Guene. After emancipation, when the plantation owners' control was slowly diminishing and more people were granted government lands to live on, the Church attempted to take over control of the celebration: following the procession, people would give part of their harvest to the priests. This was called the '*seú di pastor*'.

The Church also believed that the impoverished condition in which many Afro-Curaçaoans lived following emancipation had negative effects on their behaviour and morality. The government was reluctant to help those who were too old, sick or feeble to work. In 1879 the governor wrote to the district master of Bandabou, explaining that it had

never been the State's intention to be responsible for the welfare of the elderly, let alone fifteen years after emancipation (Brenneker 1986:125).

Following emancipation, the Roman Catholic Church was one of the main institutions attempting to alleviate poverty within the Afro-Curaçaoan community. The Church aided the poor in many areas; priests often acted as intermediaries between the government and the poor or the disabled when seeking financial help. The district masters would appeal to the priests for the names of people in their parishes in need of financial relief. They would also make arrangements with the State for the care of the poor. There was always work for the Society established before emancipation to provide funds for the poor to pay for medical treatment and funeral expenses.

Roman Catholic priests often acted as arbiters in family problems, for example between parents and children or between husband and wife, in the case of the former having an extramarital relationship. They also helped to prevent eviction from the lands. According to Armando Lampe, the Roman Catholic Church was more efficient in helping the poor than the State and people would first go to there for help. Lampe (1991:19) argues that since the mid-nineteenth century, the social service of the Roman Catholic Church was well organized and efficient. Many members of the older generation recalled with gratitude the aid they received from the Church in their fight against poverty. A female informant confirmed this and related how the priest

would help you, when you had a sick child. He would send and look for medicine. When we had a year of bad harvest, he used to send to look for seed in Aruba. He would share with everyone. Everyone would receive a kana di maishi¹⁰ for them to plant and if it rained we would have food to throw away. We did not have any money. Oh yes, there was money, but for those in the Fort' (the popular name for the colonial government).¹¹

Likewise, another elderly person reminisced:

Mi ta kòrda tabatin un pader akí, e pader yama Kris. Mi ke ku el a muri. E pader tabata yuda hende. E tempu ei bo tabatin botika di Shon Inchi, den Herenstraat, pariba di Jules Penha. E tabata manda e hòmber ku tabata serka dje riba kabai, bai buska un anis ku yama 'anis sou'. Buska su bòter di labizjan bini kuné. E pastor tabata parti un bòter pareu pa kada hende.¹²

I remember a priest. His name was Kris. He must have died. The priest used to help people. In those days you had the drugstore of Shon Inchi, in the Herenstraat (Punda), east side of the store of Jules Penha. He used to send the man who worked for him on horseback for a drink named 'Anís sou'.¹³ He would come with a demi-john of the booze. Then he would give everyone a small bottle.

At the same time priests also worked towards instilling acceptance of poverty in the people. Religion was used as an important instrument for accepting destiny. Phrases such as 'keda konforme ku kiko bo tin' (be satisfied with what you have), 'no tin pena sin Gloria' (there is no suffering without glory), 'probresa ku onor no ta ofensivo' (poverty with honour is no disgrace) recurred in many discourses.¹⁴ A priest describing the poor

community of San Willibrordus in the western part of the island in a Church magazine concluded his article by noting that ‘the people of San Willibrordus are poor, very poor and live in miserable houses, but their religion gives them comfort. We only must have patience and keep on hoping, one of the virtues of dealing with poverty.’¹⁵

An informant reiterated this:

T.P.: *Barika yen ta ruman di mal morto.*

E.J.: *Kiko esei ke men?*

T.P.: *Ora bo barika ta yen, bo ta hasi kos ku bo no tin mester di hasi. Laga nos pone ku bo ta na kas sintá, bo ta pensa ku bo tin ku bai laman bai landa. Bo ta bai landa, anto hoga. Un otro ehèmpel di barika yen: bo tin sèn den bo saku. Bo ta sintá na kas, no, bo ta sali bai bebe. Bo ta fuma, bo ta haña bo den un aksidente. Bo ta sali asina ei bai buska bo morto. Bo no ke keda kas, pasó plaka ta mandabo sali.*¹⁶

T.P.: *A full belly is the brother or sister of bad death.*

E.J.: *What does that mean?*

T.P.: *When your belly is full, you do things which you should not do. For instance: you will sit at home, and it occurs to you that you have to go to the beach. You will go to swim, and drown. Another example of a full belly: you have money in your pocket. You will not stay at home; you will go out and drink. You are drunk and will get an accident. So you will just go out to look where death is. You don't want to stay at home, because the money encourages you to go out.*

In this process of conversion and civilizing some individual missionaries stood out due to their actions. Jean and John Comaroff state that anthropologists examine in minute detail the social and cultural conventions of Africans, whereas Europeans are seldom placed under the same scrutiny. The evangelists are not studied as individuals, with socially conditioned biographies that make a difference, but are taken for granted, faceless actors on the colonial stage. However, their actions and interactions were deeply influenced by their backgrounds, their cultures and ideologies (Comaroff 1991:54). On Curaçao this was also the case. Over time the Catholic Church encouraged priests to alternate in preaching to the congregations. In this way the people were exposed to different interpretations and approaches to the idea of civilization.

Certain priests left their mark on Church policies, which on their implementation were either accepted or resisted by the people. In addition, individual priests – through their deeds and sermons – provoked emotion in the congregations and were remembered in oral narratives. For example, Vincent Jansen, who was born on 1 June 1850 in the Dutch town of Schiedam and who arrived on the island on 16 December 1876, was remembered long after his death on 5 August 1890. Many elderly people spoke about him with much respect, even though they had not known him personally. As a secular priest¹⁷, he was not tied to any particular congregation, but fell directly under the vicar apostolic. Besides being a priest, he was an orator, photographer, writer (under the name ‘Ipi’) and the inventor of an electric master clock, which he patented in the United States in 1889 (Latour 1950:24).

But it was principally his effort in setting up the community of Willibrordus, by helping a number of people to become autonomous fishermen that made him popular among the people. In that way people could do other types of work, making them less dependent

on working the land and the salt-pans of the surrounding plantations. Jansen was therefore called 'tata di pober', father of the poor (Latour 1940:25). He also promoted a form of fishing which was applied by other fishermen in Westpunt and placed two men at the head of the business.¹⁸

The Union of Marriage

A sphere of life in which the Church played an important role was that of marriage and family life. Once free, couples were no longer denied the possibility of legal marriage. The issue then became: how to encourage people to embrace this new possibility?

Previously, marriage had only been of concern to the Catholic Church; now it was also the concern of the State. It would, however, take some time before both institutions would agree on the way marriage would be recognized legally and religiously. For a long time following emancipation the Church continued to consecrate the relationship between a man and a woman in the same fashion as it had during slavery. Using the so-called 'salta garoti' method it had been able to consecrate many relationships between enslaved men and women, even though the State did not recognize the legality of this union. It was officially called a 'matrimonia clandestina'. Following emancipation, the salta garoti continued to be performed by the Church, now in a more open way. However, now that slavery had ended and the law prohibiting enslaved from marriage was no longer valid, it was of importance to the State that the salta garoti was conducted after the official marriage ceremony, in the presence of the Council of Police.

The initial step taken by the colonial government was to gain information on this matter through a letter to the district masters, enquiring into the willingness of those cohabiting to enter into a legal marriage. The governor and the vicar apostolic came to an agreement, which entailed that the latter would direct his priests to encourage people to marry legally. The Roman Catholic Church welcomed this initiative by the State to further legal marriage among Afro-Curaçaoans. In turn, the district masters had to create facilities for conducting these marriages.¹⁹

Despite these arrangements, the priests remained in conflict with the State due to their limited authority regarding this issue. At one point the State even accused the Church of propagating resistance among the lower class against legal marriage. In relation to this accusation, in 1866 the government sent a confidential letter to all district masters to assess whether in their districts the Catholic priests were conducting marriages before they were legalized by civil law.²⁰ This came to light due to an accusation made by the Protestant Council of Churches that the custom of being married solely in Church was being adopted by people of the middle class. They were concerned that this practice would also proliferate among the elite.²¹

The replies the governor received from the district masters revealed that the way in which the marriage ceremony was conducted varied from district to district. For instance, the master of the third district reported that couples were married in Church after their relationship had been consolidated by law.²² In contrast, the priest responsible for marriage in the town district proved less diligent in stimulating couples to marry by civil law.

In general, children who were born within the union of *salta garoti* were registered as illegitimate by the State, whereas at their baptism in the Catholic Church they were registered as *filus legitimus* and their parents as a married couple by the Catholic priest.²³ This consequently led to confusion regarding the status of these children in society. This would manifest itself, for example, when they could not inherit any possessions from their father. A commissioner reported that in his district the priest had begun encouraging people from his parish to marry legally, after learning that a woman and her children had experienced problems in inheriting the possessions of her deceased husband whom she had married in Church but had failed to record the marriage legally. He further stated that priests were frustrated that children of couples who were only married in Church were registered as illegitimate children.

The Roman Catholic clergy made the government aware of the numerous difficulties a couple had to overcome in order to legalize their relationship. First of all, the relatively high cost of marriage made it unattainable for many. In order to get married legally, one had to pay a certain amount of money for stamps, legal dues, a permit from the governor of the colony and the fee for the civil servant who performed the marriage ritual.²⁴ Those who could prove that they could not afford this, were exempt from these charges. However, this search for a legal aid certificate was very difficult and time consuming. Moreover, the assessment of who was poor was done arbitrarily. Eight years after emancipation, the then vicar apostolic van Ewijk complained to the governor that on Banda Bou people were refused the possibility of marrying free of charge. A priest in that area had a list of names of 139 couples who wanted to get married legally, but were unable to procure the necessary funding (Brenneker 1986:269). A priest who was asked by the University of Leiden in the Netherlands to record the lives of the creoles on the island, wrote that some civil servants refused to conduct a marriage unless the couple paid them an extra amount of money (O.S.T. 1891:296-7).

The financial burden of a civil marriage has often been mentioned in the petitions to perform marriage at 'perculum in mora'. The term 'perculum in mora' describes a marriage ceremony that needed to be conducted urgently as one of the partners was very ill and likely to die. Often these couples had lived together for many years and had several children. Priests complained that even in these cases the government was slow to react. One district master in the outer district requested, in the common interest, to create proper facilities so that couples in his district could be married more rapidly in 'perculum in mora', regardless of the financial position of the couple.²⁵

Difficulties were reported when people had to submit the official papers necessary for marriage, such as a birth certificate. Names and surnames were often misspelled. Very often official documents were incorrect and had to be corrected through the agency of the court of Justice. Individuals petitioned for the correction of these faulty registrations. Such was the case of Antoine Martis, whose name was written in the civil register as Antonie Martis and who petitioned for it to be changed again to Antoine. This was also the case of Gerard Faustin Gerardo, who before emancipation carried the name 'van Sek' but at emancipation received the name Gerardo. He requested to be van Sek again.²⁶

People sought to record their correct name, especially if their heritage rights were threatened.²⁷ Former slaves such as Rostina Hydsinth Zurum and Eduard Jasmin, both

children of Rosa, petitioned to receive the name of Semmers, the name of their deceased father.²⁸ Children born out of wedlock petitioned to carry the name of their father, as they had always unofficially been called by that name. If no objections to the names were published, the petitioners would be granted their requests. The unwed children of Jewish fathers in particular often requested to carry the family name of their father. In most cases no objection was made to these requests. There are many cases in which children asked to carry the Jewish family name of Maduro and also received it. This is in contrast to the petitions of unwed children of the white Protestant group, who were denied from carrying the family names of their fathers.

The confusion regarding people's names was also caused by the fact that most midwives at that time could not read or write, which posed a problem when registering a child after birth. It depended, then, on how the government officials wrote down the name of the baby. In addition, civil servants themselves made mistakes in the spelling of names and surnames, causing changes in surnames in the course of time.²⁹ For example, Petronia would be spelled Petrona, Ursula would be written as Oersula, Cijntje would become Seintje etc. In that way family members sometimes carried different surnames. This even caused confusion between siblings, as due to this misspelling brothers or sisters would be registered with different surnames. For example, in a contract for a piece of land in the western part of the island, the petitioner named Lucien Alberto signed his name Lucien Albertus. The informant Yeta Albertus explained why her name was written in various ways.

Mester skibi mi nòmber ku 'us' na final. E fam akí ta konosí na Westpunt, el a bin brua akibanda. Mi a tende ku un tata tabatin 12 yu hòmbler, i nan a kambia nan fam. Ora un di e yu hòmbernan a nase, nan a skibi e fam ku 'oe', i ora un otro yu a nase nan a skibié ku 'o' na final. Hopi brúa.³⁰

You have to write my name at the end with 'us'. This family name is also known in Westpunt, but has been mixed up here. I learnt that a father had 12 sons, and that they changed the family name. At the birth of one of the sons, the family name was written with 'oe' at the end, while at the birth of another one it was written with an 'o' at the end. Very confusing.

Well into the twentieth century government officials continued registering the names of people incorrectly. For example in 1909, the Procurator General composed a list of two pages with mistakes in the registration of names made by a district commissioner in that year.³¹

The problems this could cause in later life were described by an informant in Banda Bou, born in 1903:

S.V.: Tempu mi tabata bai kasa, tabatin brua-shon den mi fam.

R.A.: Kiko ke men 'bruashon' den e kaso akí?

S.V.: Ora mi a nase nan a dunami un fam, ku nos no sa ta ken su fam e ta. Tempu mi ker a kasa, nan mester a bai buska un hende ku tabata presente ora mi mama a hañami, pa bai Kranshi i deklará ku mi mama su nòmber ta tal i tal.³²

S.V.: When I was going to get married there was some confusion about my surname.

R.A.: What do you mean by confusion?

S.V.: At birth they gave me a family name which we did not know whose name it was. When I wanted to get married they had to get someone who was present when my mother gave birth to me, to go to the Municipality and declare that my mother's name was so and so.

The Church also attempted to have its say in the choice of marriage partners. If the man was a free mason, the marriage could not be consecrated. Other factors also played a role. According to custom a young man had to be hard-working, 'un hòmbler trahadó'. He should have a piece of land to build his house on before he would get married. Just as in the rest of the Caribbean, any prospective son-in-law was always asked the question whether he had already finished his home.³³ This showed that he could be responsible for his future wife.

C.V.: *Mi papa tabata biba na Porto Mari. Nos a bai aya, nos a bini bèk.*

R.A.: *Señora su papa a keda biba aya?*

C.V.: *Sí, el a biba aya. E tabata kasá ku un mucha muhé djaya. Mi wela tabata un muhé trabahoso, e no tabata ke pa mi mama kasa ku e shon.*

R.A.: *Di kon e no a gusta?*

C.V.: *E tempunan ayá no ta manera awor akí. Mi ta kere ku e mama di e mucha hòmbler i mama di mi mama no tabata duna mashá. Wèl e no tabata ke.*

R.A.: *'No tabata duna' ke men ku nan no tabata bai bon ku otro?*

C.V.: *E tempu ayá bo mama ta bisa e no ke e hende, bo ta obedesé. E no ta gusta e mama, e yu ta tende. E mama ke men miéntras su wowo ta habrí, e yu ei no ta kasa ku e hòmbler ei. E mama a bisa shon, e buska su otro hende. No ta manera aworakí. Ku e no ke, e no ke. E yu ta bai tras di su mama.³⁴*

C.V.: *My father lived in Porto Mari. We went there and came back.*

R.A.: *Your father stayed and lived there?*

C.V.: *Yes, he lived there. He was married with a girl from there. My grandmother was a very obstinate woman. She did not want my mother to marry the shon.*

R.A.: *Why did she not want that?*

C.V.: *It was different in those days. I think that the mother of the man did not like the mother of my mother. So she did not want that.*

R.A.: *This means that they did not like each other, they didn't get along?*

C.V.: *In those days, when your mother tells you that she does not like someone, you would listen to her. The mother thinks that as long as she is alive the child would not marry that man. The mother told the shon to look for someone else. Nowadays things are different. If she did not want it, it would not happen. And the child would obey its mother.*

In general respondents stated that family members had to know every detail about the families of the prospective husband or wife. Any negative information regarding a member of the family might have obstructed the marriage.

Bo mester a bai ku madrina, padrino, yaya, ku tur kos ku bo tin ku bai kuné ora bo ta bai pidi man. Anto e mama di e hende (mucha muhé) ku bo ke bai komprometé kuné, mester konosébo bon. Bo mester ta trahadó, bo no mester ta ladron, bo mester ta hende limpi. Sigur no. Bo tin ku komprometé, ora nan aseptábo. Ke desir bo ta bishitá kas di e mucha muhé pa sinku, seis luna, òf alguitu mas, boso ya ta komprometé, anto despues bo ku e mama

You had to go with your godmother, godfather, your yaya (nanny) and some next of kin when you wanted to ask for a girl's hand. The mother of the one you wanted to court had to know you very well. You had to be a hard worker, not a thief, a clean person. Oh yes. When they accept you for their daughter, then about five to six months or a little bit longer afterwards you would be engaged to her and then you and the girl's mother would have a talk. Formerly, if you

ta papia. Si bo bai kas di mama bai pidi man, si bo no tin bo propio kas lantá, nan ta bisa ku bo tin ku lanta bo kas promé. Ora bo kasa den kiko bo ta pon'é bo señora?

Ántes tur kos tabata mashá na òrdu. Awor akí ta kon ku bai laga bai. Tempunan ayá, ku bo ta bai kas di bo mucha muhé promé biaha, bo mester bai ku bo padrinu, e padrinu ku a batisábo, bo yaya ku a kargabo, bo madrina di batisá, bo tata, bo mama, bo ruman... Bo tin ku avisá e hendenan siman padilanti ku bo ke bin hasi bishita, pa duna di konosé, ke desir ku bo ta akudí ku nan yu. Anto e ora ei nan ta bai mira kiko nan ta disidí. Nan mester mira ku bo ta famia di bon hende. Ku bo no ta rasa di ladron. Ku bo no ta matadó di hende, promé ku nan risibí bo den nan kas.³⁵

did not have your own house built yet, you could not go to the house of the mother of the girl you were in love with to ask for her hand. You had to have a house built first. If not, when you got married, where would you put the woman? In the past everything was well organized. Not any longer. If for the first time you were going to visit the home of the girl, you had to go with your godfather and godmother who had baptized you, your yaya who had carried you to church, your father, mother, brother... You had to tell the people some weeks in advance that you were coming. They will find out whether the members of your family are good people. Whether you don't have a thief in the family, or a killer, before they receive you in their home.

According to some informants these rules mostly applied to those with a darker skin. In a society where a lighter complexion was associated with better jobs, more status, beauty, and civilized behaviour, parents were more flexible when a man with a lighter skin colour sought their daughter's hand in marriage.

For the poor, the *salta garoti* had always been a convenient solution. An informant described this as an event whereby a couple would, in their working clothes, go to the home of the priest, who would 'marry' them in the presence of a witness. For the *salta garoti* marriages people would dress modestly and incur few expenses, but this was not the case for those combining both the legal and the Church marriages. As early as 1864 Kistemaker mentioned during a conversation with the Public Prosecutor of the King that one of the bottlenecks in the marriage process was the fact that many people liked to dress for the occasion but often lacked the funds to do so.³⁶ The lower class wanted to marry as gracefully as the wealthy people (van der Gon Netcher 1868:510).

Weddings became increasingly expensive events. Members of the black population attempted to match the wedding customs of the white elite.³⁷ Effort was made to provide entertainment for the guests as well (Schipper 1933:7). This is similar to what Fernando Henriques has noted about weddings in Jamaica. "People must be entertained with music, food, rum and champagne. In the eyes of a black person, to be married without these paraphernalia would be no marriage at all."³⁸

Punitive and Encouraging Acts

To discourage premarital sex and to promote monogamous marriage, the Roman Catholic Church, under the leadership of vicar apostolic H.J.A. van Ewijk³⁹ – vicar apostolic between 1870-1886 – introduced punitive measures as well as rewards. The act of the 'Presentashon di mucha' (the presentation of the child) was among those encouraging

marriage. Once a legitimate child was six weeks old, the mother could come to Church, present it to the Virgin Mary and request the priest to bless the child, whereupon the priest would pray the 'benedictiones mulieris et infantis' (Latour 1948a:308). An interviewee recalled the following about such a blessing:

Six weeks after a child was born, there would be a presentation. After six weeks you had to go to church, thank God for having been able to give birth to a healthy child. After you had given birth to a child, you were not allowed to go anywhere before you had gone to church first. You had to go and tell the priest that you wanted to present your child to the Virgin Mary. Sometimes the 'yaya' (a lady who carried the child at baptism) would also come along. The priest would receive you with your child and your candle and present your child to the Virgin Mary. I have done it with all my nine children.⁴⁰

This presentation took into account the custom of mother and child staying indoors for the first six weeks after birth, to protect both from harm.⁴¹ In this case, the Church concurred with this custom. Indirectly, the popular class also used this ritual to invoke protection for the mother and the child through the Virgin Mary.

Van Ewijk also introduced the custom distinguishing between children born of married parents and those born out of wedlock. He introduced a two-tier system of baptism: one for children born in lawful wedlock, conducted on a Sunday, at which both a godmother and a godfather were present (Latour 1945:440). They were called 'yunan di klari-dat' (children of the light). Another system existed for children born out of wedlock, who were baptized on a weekday, at dusk, before sunrise. They were called 'yunan di skuridat' (children of the dark) or 'yunan di piká' (children born in sin) or 'yunan di diabel' (children of the devil), or sometimes even 'yunan di puta' (children of a whore).⁴² During this baptism ceremony the godfather was not allowed to be present, only a godmother. This measure marked the beginning of a life-long stigmatization by the Church of children born out of wedlock. Illegitimacy became then a shameful mark for the child.

The mother of a child born out of wedlock, who went to a priest to set a date for the baptism, was likely to be verbally castigated by the priest. An informant of mine, an unwedded mother, who had gone to request the priest to baptize her child, described the way he had behaved on that occasion:

Mi promé yunan tabata oochi. Mi no tabata kasá. Mi a bai puntra e pastor pa e batisá nan. Ora mi a puntr'é, el a kana bai, i kada biaha e tabata dal porta sera den mi kara. Masha sla mi a haña di pastor ku blat di porta.⁴³

My first children were twins. I was not married. I went to ask the priest to baptize them. When I was requesting this to the priest, he walked away and every time I asked he slammed the door in my face. I got many blows from him with the door.

However, there were people who resisted this rule from its conception. Van Ewijk wrote the following to the Prefect of the Propaganda Fide:⁴⁴

It is unbelievable to hear how many people belonging to the free masonry, also Catholics and Protestants, opposed to this measure. They voiced their protest in some of the newspapers on the island and some allowed their child born out of wedlock to be baptized by a Protestant vicar.⁴⁵ [Translation R.M. Allen]

A few years later van Ewijk would again lament in a letter, dated 24 February 1880, that the process introducing legal marriage was developing too slowly and that people continued to live in a so-called immoral state, despite the Church's best efforts. He attributed this to the fact that it was still difficult to persuade the coloured class to first marry legally and then marry in Church. Again the lack of facilities provided by the government, particularly in the outer districts, was seen as a major factor hindering the popularity of legal marriage. In town facilities were somewhat better.⁴⁶ Sometimes the Church authorities would openly complain about what they considered to be feeble efforts made by the government.

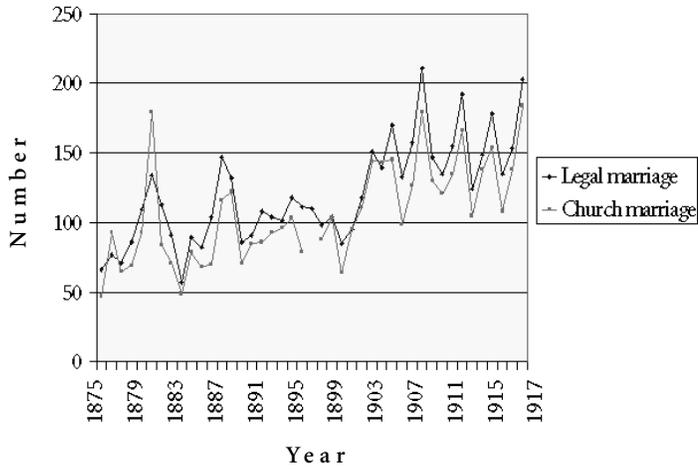
The Roman Catholic Church forwarded various strategies to establish monogamous marriage among Afro-Curaçaoans. They used different methods to attain their goal. Besides measures mentioned previously, the Church began burying people who had cohabited out of wedlock in the 'chiké', a Papiamentu word for pigsty. The 'chiké' was often situated at the back of the cemetery and was on unconsecrated ground. In this way the Church brought shame on the family of the deceased, who held the Catholic burial in high regard. In order to avoid this shame, they would sometimes turn to the Protestant Church to conduct the burial.

Another strategy employed by priests was to regularly visit families in their homes and to teach them about marriage and family life. According to an informant, 'they would come to your home and advise a man and a woman who lived together as a couple to get married (*drecha bida*). Some did, some did not.'⁴⁷ Sometimes people who had been living together and who were admitted into the hospital run by the Catholic Church were pressurized to marry (van der Mark 1999:223).

Any individual living on mission land who violated the code of behaviour faced expulsion. Priests would also request district masters to chase individuals from government land when they fell foul of their rules and norms. In this way an entire family could be outcast by the Church.

The impact of these missionary activities can be seen in the data in Graph 1, indicating the number of people who were married legally and those who were married in the Catholic Church. Records of the number married in Church only began in the year 1875.

Graph 6.1 Legal marriage vs Church marriage

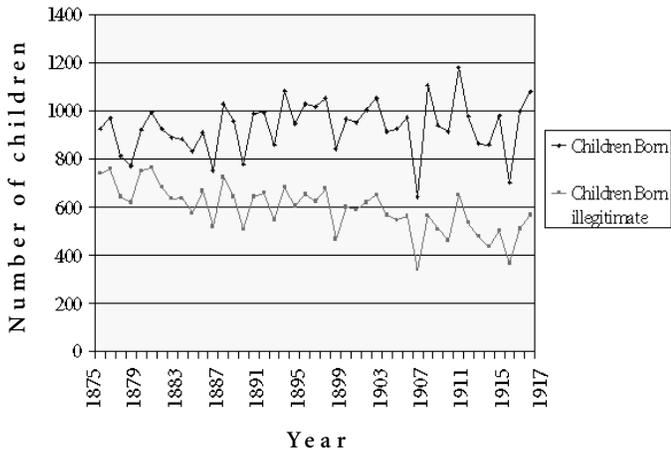


Source: Koloniale Verslagen 1875-1917

This graph shows that in the course of time the number of legal marriages increased. In a sense it goes against the complaints of the Roman Catholic Church that the lack of facilities encouraged people to marry only in Church.

Graph 6.2 gives an overview of children born between 1863-1917. The term 'registered as illegitimate' refers to children born out of legal wedlock.

Graph 6.2 Number of children born and number of children born illegitimate



Source: Koloniale Verslagen 1863-1917

Here it is also visible that the number of children registered as illegitimate decreases over the years. Their number would have been even lower if it had been taken into account that the State and the Church employed different registration criteria. At baptism, a child born out of legal wedlock was registered by the clergy as legitimate, while a government official would register it as illegitimate. This implies that the Church recognized a durable relationship and the presence of a father in the life of the child, which the State denied.⁴⁸ Eva Abraham van der Mark noted (1973) that the number of children born out of legal wedlock decreased after the arrival of Shell on the island. However, Graph 6.2 indicates that around 1910 the decrease had already set in.

Over the years, Church and elite complained about the fact that the number of children born out of wedlock remained high. It was generally believed that one could measure the level of civilization and development by assessing the percentage of children born in lawful wedlock.⁴⁹ In 1902 a priest commented that ‘the mission became so ashamed when they saw that in 1901, of the 1004 children born in that year, 617 were born out of wedlock. What a poor impression this will give people in the Netherlands about the state of morality in Curaçao.’⁵⁰ Some blamed this high figure on the failure of the Roman Catholic Church in its civilizing mission. Priests were accused of not having done enough. Even though a Protestant historian such as Hamelberg adhered to this view, he still recognized the efforts made by the Roman Catholic Church in a letter to the *Amigoe* in 1904. According to Hamelberg, if it were not for the Roman Catholic Church, people in the outer districts would be at a loss. He stated that ‘Thanks to their contribution, these people were not left to their fate, as they were by the government.’⁵¹

Gradually the beliefs regarding illegitimacy shaped by the Catholic Church were accepted by the people and illegitimacy began to carry a stigma. Names such as ‘yu teduki’, ‘yu di piká’, yu di porko or ‘yu di diabel’ and ‘yu di puta’⁵² became part of the daily discourse. Children who were born out of wedlock could not later be ordained as priests or be trained to work as schoolteachers etc.

The Church continually stressed family life as a standard for morality. Legitimate children whose families participated in Church matters were considered a ‘bon famia’ (good family). In its attempts to spread the word among the population, a weekly series of life stories was published in Papiamentu newspapers; initially in *La Union*, published by the *Gezellenblad van de Sint Josef (Club San Hose)*, but when this periodical ceased to exist, the stories would continue in *La Cruz*.⁵³ They concerned everyday life, focused on the morals and values preached and ran alongside news items. Naturally, the success of this method depended heavily on the level of literacy within the population. To spread the message, those able were asked to read these stories aloud to the illiterate. Missionaries played an important role in the process of writing and publishing in Papiamentu.

In these didactic articles, often written in a simple narrative form, priests attempted to make their moral teachings more accessible to the people. In several stories focusing on family life and the significance of fatherhood, they stressed virtues such as thriftiness, sobriety and the systematic accumulation of wealth.⁵⁴ This is illustrated in the following story, comparing three types of men, with the last one being used as the standard for behavior. One was a husband who worked as a mason earning about seven and a half guilders per week. This was added to the money his wife earned with a small business; their income totaled ten

guilders a week. However, this man wasted his money on the lottery, drinking, smoking and partying and failed in his duties as a father. The second man was eighteen years old and earned five to six guilders per week. He behaved in a similar way. His mother, a widower, had to work in order to take care of him. In contrast, the third man, even though he liked to drink, would every Saturday give some of his wages to his wife as well as saving part of it. Due to his thriftiness, they were eventually able to buy a piece of land.⁵⁵

Other stories related morality to work ethics. Missionaries wrote and used stories and newspaper articles to criticize idleness and to promote a work ethic in order to ensure the well-being of families. The theme of work ethics was discussed in a series of articles during the year 1889, which began with the definition of a good Catholic worker. According to the author this was a person who worked by the sweat of his forehead.⁵⁶ Furthermore, the author compared free work to slavery and stated that the obligation to work does not imply that you are forced to work against your will. Work is a divine activity. A worker has to fulfill his task as this is the will of God.

Another aspect of the Church's mission was its effort to eradicate alcohol abuse among the popular class, highlighting the negative effects within the family. Alcohol consumption among the enslaved was high, as was pointed out in the emancipation letter of vicar apostolic Kistemaker.⁵⁷ A male informant sang to me the following song and expressed the theme as follows:

*Presently, it is not as before. Formerly they had a reason to sing it. They used to sing it, because we used to overdo it. When we arrived somewhere, instead of bringing our money home to our wives, we would waste it on alcohol. When we drank too much, our wives did not get any money.*⁵⁸

He then sang:

Rom ta dushi?

Rom ta dushi?

P'e maldito buraché

Rom ta dushi?

Is Rum sweet?

Is Rum sweet?

For the cursed drunkard

Is Rum sweet?

This was an orally transmitted version of the song, composed by Father Poeisz, to warn against the effects of alcohol.⁵⁹ The fact that it became an oral tradition and that it was sung by several of my informants, demonstrates that the use of songs as an educative device had some success. These songs were virtuous and didactic and aimed to change the negative behaviour of the popular class (van Panhuys 1934:315).

The reality of alcoholism should be taken seriously. Most of the time workers received rum as part of their wages. Alcoholism was one of the causes of aggression among Afro-Curaçaoans, often in the form of domestic violence (van Soest 1977:18). Priests used all types of didactic devices to discourage alcoholism. The following was published in the newspaper *La Cruz*.

*Rom ta dushi? L'e ta dushi.
 P'e maldito buraché
 Koe ta bandona famia
 Pa bai bebe com k'e kié
 Rom ta dushi? L'e ta dushi
 P'e perverso buraché
 Koe pa causa dje bebida
 Pa toer hende'a desprecié
 Rom ta dushi!
 Ta palabra
 Dje malbado buraché
 Koe ta camna panja sushi
 I toer hende ta harié
 Rom ta dushi! Rom ta dushi!
 Pobercito buraché
 El a drenta toer e shapnan
 Bebe e cos pa venené
 Rom ta dushi! Rom ta dushi!
 Mir'e pober buraché
 C'un zapatoe sin nanishi
 Sin tin placa pa dreché
 Bo ta kere rom ta dushi
 Desgraciado buraché?
 Drei bo mira bo mes culpa
 Na ki estado b'a poné
 Ai no kere rom ta dushi
 Pretencioso buraché
 Corda bon di bo famia
 Na ki estado b'a largé
 Aleha bo fo'i dje bicio
 Lastimoso buraché
 Rom ta causa di toer maloe
 Hui, hui for di djé.⁶⁰*

*Is Rum sweet? It must be sweet
 For the cursed drunkard
 Who abandons his family
 To drink how he wants
 Is Rum sweet? It must be sweet
 For the perverse drunkard
 That for the cause of the drink
 Already everyone despises him
 Rum is sweet!
 That is the word
 Of the wicked drunkard
 Who walks with dirty clothes?
 Moreover, everyone laughs at him
 Rum is sweet! Rum is sweet!
 Poor drunkard
 He went to all the bars
 To drink the drink that poisons him
 Rum is sweet! Rum is sweet!
 Look at the poor drunkard
 With shoes without caps
 Without money to fix them
 Do you believe that Rum is sweet
 Disgraceful drunkard?
 Turn around and look at your own body
 In which state you have put it
 Oh, don't think that Rum is sweet
 Pretentious drunkard
 Think about your family
 In what state you left it
 Kick the habit
 Pitiful drunkard
 Rum is the cause of all evil
 Fly, fly away from it.*

Creating Respectable Citizens

For the Roman Catholic Church, educating young Afro-Curaçaoans was an important element in instilling respectability. Education entailed teaching young people Christian values and norms. One year before emancipation, a priest wrote:

Young people need school education alongside religious education. We do not need priests who are only acquainted with our mission, and who do not recognize and supply the need of the Negroes. We lack instructors and find hundreds of children in the different parishes growing up with no school education at all.⁶¹

Following emancipation, the number of children attending mission schools increased (*Koloniaal Verslag* 1864). But the Roman Catholic Church depended on a subsidy from the government enabling it to broaden its education programme among the black lower class. Reluctantly it had to accommodate certain governmental interests if it wanted to continue its civilizing mission. This led to its independent position being compromised. Even though a general decree regarding emancipation stipulated that schools run by the Church needed to be encouraged and supported along with those run by the State, the grants given by the government to religious education were small and many schools were in a state of decay. Thus one of the greatest obstacles faced by the Roman Catholic mission on Curaçao was funding. For example, in the early 1880s the four public schools on the island received a total of 18.000 guilders per year, while the seven Catholic schools received an allowance of only 7.000 guilders. These four public schools, each with approximately five hundred students, had four teachers, each with three or four assistant teachers, whereas the Roman Catholic schools had fifteen hundred pupils in seven schools, with only eighteen nuns as teachers.⁶² Missionaries would constantly express hope tinged with frustration when dealing with this situation. Often they appealed to Dutch Catholics in the Catholic magazines distributed in the Netherlands, requesting money to either build a school, a church or a home for the priest on the island.

Education involved more than merely teaching children to read and write. It also entailed teaching them moral standards. This was clearly stated in an article in the *Amigoe*, in which the author expressed that:

*Education, as an instrument of developing knowledge, cannot exist '... without morally forming the heart and mind'. All discussions as to whether school should give moral 'teaching' are a waste of time and words. The school is a powerful element in the education and therefore in moral formation as well.*⁶³

In its attempt to create respectable citizens, the Church paid special attention to young women. Priests would frequently write about the various kinds of menace young women encountered in society, hampering them in leading a moral and decent life.

The town in particular was considered an area of low morality. Even though those living in town were generally believed to be more civilized than their rural counterparts, priests were often alarmed by the immoral life style prevalent in these urban communities. They therefore diligently worked to elevate the moral standards of this group (Latour 1953:47).

Town and country were communicating vessels as many impoverished people, especially young women, moved to town in the hope of finding work. Their plight made them vulnerable to exploitation and they were likely to become victim to this moral decay. Therefore the priests considered them in need of special attention (Latour 1952:23). The aforementioned priest who published under the initials O.S.T. denounced the practice of young women being sexually exploited by their employers.⁶⁴ The apostolic vicar G.M. A.M. Vuylsteke, in his pastoral letter of 5 February 1917 regarding morality, also addressed this issue. The case of the daughter of James Hooi, which was presented by the priest of Westpunt in a letter of 28 July 1917 to the district master, again illustrates this problem. The

daughter of Hooi was made pregnant by the son of her employer, who denied responsibility. Her father requested the aid of the guardians' supervisory board in obtaining custody of the child.⁶⁵

Girls between fourteen and sixteen years of age could become members of an organization named 'The Legion of Virgin Mary' or *Kongregashi*. Some were chosen by the nuns while others volunteered. The girls called *kongrenis* had to be unblemished. They had to display high moral conduct, which related to their actions and the way they dressed. They were tightly supervised and constrained, isolated from boys their own age and could not participate in any activities other than those organized by the Catholic Church. They were not allowed to participate in local popular cultural events and happenings, such as the *tambú* and *ocho dia*, representations of an immoral and pagan way of life. Their solitary life was an important characteristic of their respectability. The ethnologist Juliana, who interviewed several former *kongrenis*, was told the following by an informant:

A.M.: *Si bo ta kongrenis, nan mirabo un kaminda ku nan no ta gusta, nan ta bai, bai bisa pastor. Mi tanta a kontami ku e ku mi mama tabata kongrenis. Un hende a bai bisa pastor ku el a mira un mucha muhé meskos ku mi tanta na ocho dia. Nan a bai, bai bisa riba nan.*

E.J.: *Bai bisa pastor.*

A.M.: *Ku nan a mira nan na ocho dia. Pastor a saka nan tur dos for di kongregashi.*

E.J.: *Bo no por a bai ni ocho dia?*

A.M.: *Ni ocho dia kantá bo no por bai, ni baile di plaka. Ni bo no por a bai tambú. Nan weta bo, nan ta bai bisa pastor anto ta sakabo for di kongregashi. Asina tabata tempu ayá. Ku bo ta kongrenis, asina ei. Bo tin ku bai misa, bo por bai un fiesta den dia, ma anochi bo no por ta na fiesta. Niun. Ahan, mané, si tin balia di ka'i músika den dia, pa fiesta, bo por bai. Pero si ta kos di plaka, fiesta ku bo ta paga plaka, bo no por bai. Mashá estrikto bida di kongrenis tabata. Ma awor mi ke ku no tin kongrenis mes mas. Bo tin ku bai kongregashi ku bo medaya, ku bo sinta blou na bo garganta.⁶⁶*

A.M.: *If you are a kongrenis (member of a Roman Catholic congregation) and people see you somewhere they do not like, they will go and tell the priest. My aunt told me that she and my mother were kongrenis. Someone went and told the priest that she saw a girl just like my aunt at an ocho dia. She went and told the priest.*

E.J.: *Went and told the priest.*

A.M.: *That they saw my mother and her sister at an ocho dia. The priest chased both of them from the Kongregashi.*

E.J.: *You could not even participate in the ocho dia?*

A.M.: *Not even an ocho dia kantá, no dancing party for which one had to pay money, no tambú. If they saw you, and they went to tell the priest, he would chase you from the Kongregashi. It was like that in those days. You had to go to church; you could go to a feast during the day, but not at night. None whatsoever. If they had a party of the kaha di músika you could go. But nothing that had to do with money. They were very strict. Nowadays there are no kongrenis anymore. You had to go to Kongregashi with your medal and your blue ribbon around your neck.*

Juliana related to me that some of these *kongrenis* had aspired to become nuns, but were impeded from doing so because they had been born out of wedlock. He had interviewed several women who in their old age were still proud that they never married and had remained virgins.

The kongrenis were expected to remain virgins until married. Their wedding days became highly ceremonial events, celebrating the devout lives they had been living. These ceremonies were called *bini krea*, taken from the song ‘Veni Creator’, which was sung by the participating choir. The attitude of the other women towards these kongrenis ranged from admiration to contempt. Some considered the lives of the kongrenis to be dull and restrictive. Gossip was fuelled by the suspicion that some kongrenis had received the honour of Veni Creator despite becoming pregnant before marriage. Due to their close relations with the priests, people did not always trust them. They often accused them of gossiping and relaying information about people in the neighbourhood to the priests. The following tambu song is a satire about one of these girls and accuses her of illicit sex – even though she plays the refined lady. The act of sexual relationship is being described as the sucking of a lollipop.

Señorita fini

Muchanan di pastor

Nan ta chupa lòlipòp

Anto benta e palu afó

Pero mucha desidido

no tin kuenta di nada

Nan ta chupa e lòlipòp

Warda e palu te mañan

Koro:

Chupa lòlipòp

Tambe guli su papel

Chupa lòlipòp

Tambe guli su papel.⁶⁷

Refined ladies

Children of the priest⁶⁸

They suck on the lollipop

And throw the stick away

But the determined ones

Do not care about anything

They suck the lollipop

And save the stick till the next day

Chorus:

Suck on the lollipop

Swallow its rapping as well

Suck on the lollipop

Swallow its rapping as well

For women abiding by the rules laid down by the priests, there were advantages. The Roman Catholic Church created possibilities for local women to teach as non-qualified school-teachers in nurseries and primary schools and they were often given work by others on the recommendation of the priests. The Church stressed the necessity for those who taught at school to possess high moral standards; these standards also extended to their families.

Oral history shows that remaining a virgin until marriage was generally accepted as respectable behaviour within the community. Most interviewees stressed the fact that young women should marry as virgins because ‘Strea ku sali trempan, ta drenta trempan’ (Stars which rise soon, will also fade quickly). The community judged young women according to whether they had retained their virginity. The proverb ‘Mi n’ke kashu sin kashipete’ (I do not want a kashew fruit without its nut), meaning I do not want to marry a woman who is not a virgin, expresses this.

Women were educated to be domestic and pure. In a lawsuit in 1871, Virgilius, a conductor of a ferry boat, was sentenced to jail because he had pushed Juan, a farmer, into the water. Juan had reprimanded Pieternella, who came from a good family, for associating herself with Virgilius. Juan had stated this after having scolded her for walking alone on the streets at 8 o’clock in the evening.⁶⁹

The expectation of women is confirmed by the following narration:

Ora bo ta sali, bo mester bai ku yaya pa mirabo, pa tira bista. Tabata un tempu konservador. Dia mi ta'a mucha yòn, tin hopi kos ku mi no tabata mete aden. Bo no mag. Esun ku bo hende grandi ke so. Bo no por a mira tambú, bo no por a mira seú, bo no por a mira nada. Reservá. Ora bo hende grandi ta bai, si bo ke bo ta para djaleu mira un ko'i mira. Pero drent'e no.⁷⁰

When you went out, you had to go with a yaya to look after you. Those were times when people were socially very strict with their children. When I was a young girl, I did not engage in many things. You were not allowed. Only what your elders wanted. You were not allowed to go and watch a tambú, or a seú, nothing. Reserved. When adults go you may go with them and watch from a distance. But you could not participate.

Among the popular class there were several divinations through which one could see whether a woman was still a virgin. When a man wanted to know this, he would look at her and then look at a flower. If the flower was still flowering, she would be a virgin, if it wilted, she was not. Another sign was conveyed in the way she would stand up. Only if she would put her left foot first, she was a virgin (Brenneker 1961:123).

Typical is a court case brought before the judge in 1872, in which a seventeen year old Curaçaoan girl defended her name after having been accused of being a prostitute on the island of St. Thomas, and then on Curaçao.⁷¹ A woman denounced a man who sang the following song:

*Wilhelmina mi ruman,
No kulpa mi kunado
Kulpa shon Lucien
ku tin korant di bo mocedat*

*Wilhelmina, my sister
Don't blame my brother in law
Blame shon Lucien
Who can inform all about your virginity.⁷²*

The following tambú song expresses the importance of women preserving their virginity, while at the same time attempting to avoid gossip.

*Tur kos bo a konta mama
Pakiko bo n'bisa mama
Ku lampi a pèrdè su balon.
Tende kiko e shishi di
Cu su yu si ta niña
mar'e sabí ku galiña a pone
te ku ne a klòk.⁷³*

*You have told mother everything
Why didn't you tell mother
That the lamp has lost its lampshade.
Listen what the tramp is saying
That her daughter is still a virgin
if only she knew that the hen has laid an egg
and that it has even hatched*

The following tambú song is a manifestation of shame for the family of a girl who has lost her virginity. The father of the girl takes the man whom he accuses of deflowering his young daughter to the district master. The accused admits that he indeed had sexual relations with the girl, but claims that at the time she had already lost her virginity.

*Mener de Leeuw
m'a kome karni
wesu si mi n'sa di dje*

*Mister de Leeuw
I have eaten the meat
but I don't know anything about the bone*

The different treatment of the two sexes by the parents and particularly the protective stance towards the daughter is illustrated in the following song. Mothers protected the virginity of their daughters before marriage. Here the protection of the mother is rejected by the daughter.

*Mama n'ke pa mi bai akí
Mi mama n'ke pa mi bai ayá
Mama por serami den un kashi di glas
Mand'é den kombentu serka ser⁷⁴*

*Mother don't want me to go here
My mother don't want me to go there
Mama can lock me up in a glass cabinet
and send it to the sisters in the convent*

Creating a Work Ethic

The Church also paid attention to the morality of young men. A priest referred to them specifically in his remarks on the civilizing influence of Roman Catholic religion. He pointed out that the

Negroes of San Willibrordus have become different people. It is easy to understand the persistent effort required on the part of the priests so that these black boys develop in such a way that they become respectful members of society. We may compare this place to another, where people are living who are completely wild, where even cannibalism exists, where people live and die like animals.⁷⁵

Several organizations were established to educate boys. The Sint Jozef Fellowship, popularly called *Club San Hose*, was founded on 29 October 1882 in Pietermaai by the priest of the parish, with the principle aim of teaching boys a trade. The club gave its pupils the opportunity to support themselves and to eventually become responsible husbands and fathers. In order to achieve this, the organization taught the trades of masonry, carpentry, tailoring and shoemaking (Latour 1952:50). Members who lived according to the fellowship's values were favoured, as the organization rented pieces of land and built houses for its members. The cultural influence of the Church on the fellowship was seen when on 1 July 1883 its members brought a serenade to the governor, while parading in mediaeval costume from their club at Pietermaai to Scharloo, the governor's home (Latour 1952:22).

With the orphanage for young boys established at Santa Rosa in the east of the island, help was available for boys from the countryside. This orphanage was a centre for young boys without families who could learn a craft and be given an education. The boys were taught to be musicians, shoe-makers, tailors, cabinet-makers, carriage-makers or carpenters.⁷⁶ The Church received orders for carpentry from places such as Venezuela and Suriname.

Growing to maturity involved learning to assume responsibilities believed to be part of manhood. By 'building a dam against laziness and unemployment which result in poverty

and immorality, in dehumanizing the family and neglect of the education, the Church intended to instill in these boys what was expected of them as future husbands and fathers. It also helped people who were unable to perform their religious obligations (Latour 1952:51). The Church aided young men in progressing towards the possibility of starting a family and in preventing the belief that 'nice young girls would remain unmarried, as they were unable to find decent young men to secure a happy married life' (Latour 1952:51).

Often individual priests invested much time and effort in teaching trades to young men. The construction of churches was utilized as an excellent opportunity to teach boys from the parish a trade. This occurred, for example, in the building of the churches in Sint Willibrordus and Westpunt (Latour 1952:13).

The Church remained responsible for the pupils' conduct until they came of age. After this period the priests were often dismayed at the conduct of the boys and frustrated by their lack of influence over them (Latour 1952:22). Despite their desire to keep the young men within the community, they were powerless to stop them from, for example, emigrating. Young men would often emigrate as a survival strategy, but it was also an important rite of masculinity.

The Roman Catholic Church would continuously campaign against the emigration of young males from the island, citing this as one of the factors hampering their spiritual development. The missionaries were sufficiently close to this group to be aware of the disappointment the migrants often experienced. People found adaptation to their new surroundings difficult and upon their return would be impoverished. The clergy often used these examples of misfortune to deter others from leaving (*La Cruz*, 29 August and 14 November 1917). Emigration also placed a large group of young people beyond the reach of the clergy. This distressed the priests, for whom social control was essential in their civilizing mission. In that way, even the positive results of migration, when people returned with money, were negatively portrayed as fuelling the idea of the black working class being preoccupied with the material world, such as clothing, music and play.

One of the songs about migration collected by Juliana and Brenneker relates to men who in the mid-nineteenth century emigrated to Tucacas in Venezuela to work in the copper mines. The song states that these men, although having returned with a lot of money and expensive clothes, were uncouth. For that reason, they were called Luango's or Guene's.⁷⁷ As previously stated, both terms initially referred to the places of origin of the enslaved but over the years had begun to denote negative or primitive behaviour.

*Tukaka a pari Gueni,
trupa di Luangu
Tukaka a pari Gueni,
esta Luanganan!
Bo mama ta Luangu,
famia di Luangu
Rasa di Luangu
Tukaka a pari Gueni.*⁷⁸

*Tucacas has given birth to people from Guinea,
a troupe of Luango's
Tucacas has given birth to people from Guinea,
meaning Luango's!
Your mother is a Luango,
family of Luango
Luango race
Tucacas has given birth to people from Guinea*

This song seems to condemn emigrants who returned devoid of morals and links this to the acquired behaviour of those returning to the traits of ethnic African groups. The disdain

shown in this song suggests the idea that migrating elsewhere in the region leads to re-Africanization or, in this particular case, to a *reluangonization* of the black population of Curaçao. It underlines once more why the clergy, among other groups, was against people leaving the island, as they would be exposed or re-exposed to cultural influences negative to the civilizing mission.

Response to the Civilizing Mission

The teachings of the Roman Catholic priests were referred to with the term ‘Lei di pastor’, ‘the rules imposed by the priests’. The fact that these teachings were compared with the law indicates the power evoked by their words. Afro-Curaçaoans addressed priests using the term ‘shon’, as they had done with the slave-owners.

Their response to the ‘Lei di pastor’ is complex and does not adhere to one interpretation. Afro-Curaçaoans originated from many diverse African countries. During slavery, many more social divisions became established among the enslaved and the freed community. These divisions would endure following emancipation, according to criteria such as origin, skin colour, area of domicile etc.

The rapid growth in congregations following emancipation did not necessarily equate to a full acceptance of faith. The recently freed were motivated to join the Church for various reasons, which did not always coincide with those preferred by the missionaries. Some accepted Catholicism, but challenged the Church whenever they disagreed with its rules. As mentioned earlier, some Catholics reacted to the discrimination made at baptism against children born out of wedlock by baptizing their child in the Protestant Church. The Catholic Church denounced this opportunistic acceptance of the competing Christian denomination. It was also noted that some blacks were only Catholic in name, as in the proverb ‘Chimina a yega porta di San Juan i lubidá misa katólíko’ (Chimina arrived at the gate of the plantation of San Juan and forgot the Catholic Church).⁷⁹

The Church was associated by some with poverty and was called the Church of the poor.⁸⁰ Protestants and also some members of the lower class would criticize the fact that priests used images of poor black people to appeal to readers abroad in order to collect money for their activities. Some Catholics went against this negative labeling of the black people on the island. Some considered that their involvement with the Church affected their social standing (Latour 1952:15).

Other Afro-Curaçaoans were devout Catholics and lived according to the rules laid down by the missionaries. For some of these people the Church offered a status above that of their peers and they would receive benefits accordingly. For example, some Afro-Curaçaoans who had learnt to read and write and lived a respectable life, attained leading positions in a funeral organization called the ‘sitter’.⁸¹ Or they could be granted a piece of land from the Church in order to build a house and so become independent from land owners. A good parishioner could even count on the help of the Church in legal matters.

It seems that women were more receptive to the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church than men. A priest commented on this when he wrote in 1877:

Already at this moment there is a core group of god-fearing people, whom we can set as an example. Also more and more, there are people who are ashamed to commit crime, especially women.⁸²

This different response to the Catholic Church is illustrated in Table 6.2. This Table gives an insight into the participation rate of men and women at the obligatory Easter Confession and Communion. According to Muriel Nazzari (1996:111) through the sacrament of confession the Church sought to control the morality of the population. The faithful were advised to confess frequently, but ecclesiastical law obliged them to confess at least once a year during Lent. Curaçaoan parish priests were ordered to prepare annual lists of members of all households in their parish, and to record whether males over fourteen and females over twelve years of age had confessed before Easter.

As one informant stated:

Tempu ayá tabatin un lugá spesial pa dera un hende ku muri sin ku el a konfesá risibí den tempu di Kuaresma.

Pastor ta skibi tur hende su nòmber ku a kumpli ku Kuaresma. Si bo nòmber no ta den buki, ta fièrnu bo ta bai.

I nan ta derabo den chiké. Esei ta pida kurá parti pabou di santana.⁸³

In those days there was a special place for people who did not go to confession and to communion during Lent.

The priest would write down all the names of those who did comply with Lent. If your name is not in the book, you will go to hell.

You would be buried in the chiké, that is in a separate place at the western part of the cemetery.

The following Table indeed shows that more women participated in the Easter Communion and that more men remained outside the fold of Christianity.

Table 6.2 Number of Males and Females Participating in the Easter Communion

Year	Male	Female
1870	-	-
1875	3872	7624
1880	3801	7678
1885	-	-
1890	-	-
1895	-	-
1900	7652	13333
1905	8269	14347
1910	9443	15883
1915	10630	18243

Source: Provinciaat Vicariaat der Paters (1945:3-4)

One of the benefits of keeping to these rules was that one would be provided with a decent Catholic burial. The 'marka buraku' (to mark one's grave), as it was called, meant that one assured having a consecrated burial ground ready for burial and that one would not be buried in a place called the 'chiké'. Abiding by the rules of Lent was referred to in the same way. An informant asserted that

Tempunan ayá pastor sa presis ken ta kumpli ku kuaresma, pasó e ta skibi bo nòmber den buki. Tur djadumingu bo mester a bai misa. Den kuaresma nos mester a lanta tres or di mardugá pa bai misa. Tabatin hopi hende i si bo yega lat, bo no ta haña un lugá di sinta. Tempu ayá si bo kumpli ku kuaresma, pastor sa, pasobra e ta skibi bo nòmber den buki.⁸⁴

In those days the priest knew for sure whether you had kept the rules of Lent (kumpli ku kuaresma), for he wrote down your name in his book. Every Sunday you had to go to church. In the period of Lent, we had to wake up at three in the morning to go to church. There were a lot of people and if you were late you would not get a place to sit. In those days if you complied with Lent, the priest would know, because he would write your name in a book.

Conclusion

The Roman Catholic Church was the prime institution exercising authority and control over the lives of Afro-Curaçaoans. In its civilizing mission the Church aimed to create a Catholic mindset which required that in addition to people adhering solely to the Catholic creed and liturgy and banning all other religious beliefs and practices, they should avoid behaviour considered negative and rather focus on becoming *hende drechi* (decent people). For every *bon katólíko*, the Church maintained a firm line in what it considered correct and moral behaviour.

The different strategies it used in its civilizing mission covered many areas of social life. It ranged from social assistance for the economically marginalized groups and the education of young people to a more direct exercise of control through rules and sanctions, including the exclusion of people from certain privileges, such as a proper baptism or burial. It also included physical abuse of those who manifested obstinate disobedience.

The Church succeeded in pervading the private lives of people in a way the State never did, and in doing so influencing what Scott has called the hidden transcripts. The response by Afro-Curaçaoans to the influence of the Church has been paradoxical. On the one hand they were attracted by the value system of the Church. Abiding by it opened up doors, but at the same time it imposed values which were not always shared and clearly not always obeyed. Some therefore tended to resist the control of the Church in various ways. On the other hand, being a good Catholic meant a change of identity, which implied not only an adherence to Catholic religious beliefs and practices, but a person tended to be moulded in character and behaviour by the Church as well. For those who reached this condition, it had social advantages, as they could be employed in institutions directed by the Catholic Church, such as schools and hospitals, and in that way rise in social position as well. Likewise, children from couples who lived in monogamous relationships would also benefit.

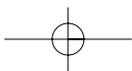
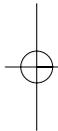
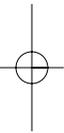
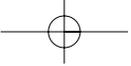
In the following Chapters it will become clear to what extent Afro-Curaçaoans adopted the teachings of this influential body and how they accommodated or bent the concept of 'bida drechi' to suit their private lives.

Notes

- 1 *Kerkelijke Courant*, no. 291, vol. 28, 26-7-1862.
- 2 Idem.
- 3 *Kerkelijke Courant*, no. 291, vol. 28, 26-7-1862.
- 4 *Kerkelijke Courant*, no. 368, vol. 30, 16-1-1864.
- 5 Idem.
- 6 *Rozenkrans* 1879:55.
- 7 Kerstgeschenk 1883:166.
- 8 *Kerkelijke Courant*, no. 368, vol. 30, 16-1-1864; Letter Kistemaker in *Indisch Missietijdschrift* 1963, vol. 46, p. 9-13. See also *Amigoe*, 1-7-1963 (integral publication of the letter).
- 9 The anthropologist L.F. Triebels (1980) has discussed whether this custom is in fact African. However, for many years it was generally seen as a surviving African ritual and was also considered as such by the Catholic clergy at the time.
- 10 One *kana di maishi* is circa one litre of maize.
- 11 Interview Geertruda Alberto (Ma Tuda) (born 1883), Allen, 13-3-1984 (NatAr).
- 12 Interview Celestina Elizabeth (born 1897), Allen, 5-10-1981 (NatAr). She lived in the eastern part of the island.
- 13 A drink made from the seed of the plant called 'anis', derived from the Latin word *anisum*.
- 14 *La Cruz*, 11-2-1903. The title of the article is 'Pobreza no ta berguenza' (Poverty is not a shame).
- 15 Kerstgeschenk 1883:186.
- 16 Interview Thomas Plantina (date of birth not registered), Brenneker/Juliana, 10-2-1976 (T 52, Fundashon Biblioteka Públiko Kòrsou).
- 17 He was called 'Pader di paña pretu' (the priest who wears a black rope) due to the fact that the members of his congregation wore a black rope (Latour 1940:3).
- 18 Vincent Jansen had a carpentry and blacksmith workshop. He built two large sailing ships and different types of boats for the fishermen of his parish. He also gave the men and women lines so that they could knit fishing nets. In that way he encouraged the people from his parish to take up fishing for a living. See Langenfeld 2001b:2.
- 19 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Ingekomen stukken 3e district, 1860-1905, 8-3-1864/73.
- 20 NA, Ministerie van Koloniën, 1850-1900, inv. no. 6741, 25-6-1866/405.
- 21 NA, Ministerie van Koloniën, 1850-1900, inv. no. 6741, 25-6-1866/405.
- 22 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Geheime stukken, 1861-1880, inv. no. 3659, 17-7-1866/1, 19-7-1866/no number, 19-7-1866/55, 20-7-1866/18 and 17-10-1866/2 (letter vicar apostolic I.B. Schermer).
- 23 An analysis of the books of baptism of several churches reveals that at the time babies were baptized within six days following birth. This is also confirmed by oral history.
- 24 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, 1863-1904, inv. no. 127, 23-9-1863/54.
- 25 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, 1863-1904, inv. no. 127, 23-9-1863/54. See NA, Ministerie van Koloniën, 1850-1900, inv. no. 6749, 20-3-1880/102 (besides the home of the district master another building was indicated where marriages could be conducted free of charge) and 27-3-1880/109 (the hour for marriage was left to the decision of the district master).
- 26 NA, Ministerie van Koloniën, 1850-1900, inv. no. 6741, 6-2-1866/85.

- 27 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Geheime stukken, 1861-1880, inv. no. 3659, 16-7-1866.
- 28 NA, Ministerie van Koloniën, 1850-1900, inv. no. 6740, 11-4-1865/194.
- 29 See NA, Ministerie van Koloniën, 1850-1900, inv. no. 6751, 16-8- 1883/437. The governor urges the civil servants and assistant civil servants of the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages to register the names of children and their parents correctly. See also *La Union*, 23-1-1895: the priest devotes a whole article to the problem of misspelled names.
- 30 Interview Aniceta (Yeta) Albertus (born 17-5-1902 in Willibrordus), Allen, 2-9-1984 (NatAr).
- 31 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Ingekomen stukken 2e en 3e district, 1906-1924, inv. no. 102, 2-4-1909/141.
- 32 Interview Seferina Valks (born 1903), Allen/Ernest Gaari, 8-9-1983 (NatAr).
- 33 NA, Ministerie van Koloniën, 1850-1900, inv. no. 6784, 24-11-1886/718.
- 34 Interview Carlota Victoria (born 28-4-1914), Allen, 7-5-2001, Private Collection.
- 35 Interview Thomas Plantina (date of birth not registered), Brenneker/Juliana, 10-2-1976 (T 52, Fundashon Biblioteka Públiko Kòrsou).
- 36 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Ingekomen stukken 3e district, 1860-1905, 3-3-1864/73.
- 37 See letter vicar apostolic H.J.A. van Ewijk, 6-7-1877, regarding the role of marriage in people's lives. According to him some people were reluctant to get married because they lacked the proper attire. NatAr, Lijst van ontvangen stukken, Pastorie Sint Anna, inv. no. 9 (Pastorale brieven), NatAr.
- 38 Henriques quoted in Joubert 1983:185.
- 39 Van Ewijk's previously mentioned letter of 6-7-1877 was sent to the priests of the parishes to be included in the following Sunday's sermon; it contained instructions for discussion topics for the entire year. NatAr, Lijst van ontvangen stukken, Pastorie Sint Anna, inv. no. 9 (Pastorale brieven) NatAr.
- 40 Interview V. Catharina Theodora (born September 1914), Brenneker/Juliana, 16-6-1983 (T 89, Fundashon Biblioteka Públiko Kòrsou).
- 41 There were many beliefs regarding pregnancy and births. It was believed that during pregnancy a supernatural bond existed between mother and fetus. For example, the fetus of an emotionally unstable woman would feel and register a shock physically as a blemish or a deformity. The fetus may also be marked by its mother's cravings for a particular kind of food. It was commonly believed that a child may be affected in a similar way if the mother-to-be ate food considered taboo.
- 42 Brenneker 1970:1159-60.
- 43 Interview (no christian name registered). Simmons (born 1888), Allen, 15-1-1980 (NatAr).
- 44 The Sacred Congregation *de Propaganda Fide*, is the department of the pontifical administration charged with the spread of Catholicism and with the regulation of ecclesiastical affairs in non-Catholic countries.
- 45 Latour 1952:21.
- 46 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Gouverneur, civiel binnenlandse correspondentie, inv. no. 3652, (1-2) 24-2-1880.
- 47 Interview Severina Valks (born 1902 in Kenepa), Allen, 8-9-1983 (NatAr).
- 48 Van Ewijk, in his letter of 12-7-1877, instructed the parish priests to keep statistical records of their parishes, including the books of baptism, marriage and deaths. These specific records gave quantifiable information. NatAr.
- 49 Hamelberg 1895. See also Irus 1910:55.
- 50 *La Cruz*, 24-9-1902.
- 51 *Amigoe*, 10-9-1904.
- 52 Brenneker 1970:1159-60.
- 53 The Roman Catholic mission, in this case the Fathers of the Dominican Order, published various weekly newspapers from 1870. In 1883 the *Amigoe di Curaçao* was founded, initially in Papiamentu and in Dutch, but after 1900, with the appearance of *La Cruz* in Papiamentu, it continued solely in Dutch. Broek 1990:61.

- 54 *La Union*, 21-8-1889.
- 55 *Idem*.
- 56 *La Union*, 3-4-1890.
- 57 *Kerkelijke Courant*, no. 368, vol. 30, 16-1-1864.
- 58 Interview Clemens Bonifacio (born 1908), Allen, 16-5-1989 (NatAr). Interview Anecita (Chita) Martina (born 21-4-1911), Brenneker/Juliana, 29-7-1982 (T 82, Fundashon Biblioteka Públiko Kòrsou).
- 59 The priest Poiesz was known for his literary abilities. He was admired by the folk class for his knowledge of Papiamentu and his talent to create songs in that language. He published a book of songs in Papiamentu.
- 60 *La Cruz*, 19-9-1919.
- 61 *Kerkelijke Courant*, no. 291, vol. 28, 26-7-1862.
- 62 NatAr, Archief bisdom, letter 16-7-1904/712. See also NatAr. Publicatie Blad 1884/16.
- 63 *Amigoe*, 30-5-1885. The author analysed the essay by dr. A. Bruinings in de *Tijdspiegel* of February 1885 regarding the debate in the Netherlands on the introduction of non-religious schools.
- 64 O.S.T. 1891:296-7.
- 65 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Districtbeheer, ingekomen stukken 4e en 5e distict, inv. no. 92, 28-7-1917.
- 66 Interview Anecita (Chita) Martina (born 21-4-1911), Brenneker/Juliana, 29-7-1982 (T 82, Fundashon Biblioteka Públiko Kòrsou).
- 67 Interview Anecita (Chita) Martina (born 21-4-1911), Brenneker/Juliana, 29-7-1982 (T 82, Fundashon Biblioteka Públiko Kòrsou).
- 68 Due to their close relationship with the priest these women were referred to as children of the priest. This term could also refer to men.
- 69 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Rol van Strafzaken, Correctionele Teregtzittingen 1871, Procesverbaal no. 32.
- 70 Interview Ana Schoop (born 1913), Allen, 1995 (NatAr).
- 71 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Rol van Strafzaken, Correctionele Teregtzittingen 1872, Procesverbaal no. 19.
- 72 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Rol van Strafzaken, Correctionele Teregtzittingen 1892, Procesverbaal no. 14.
- 73 Brenneker 1970:1823.
- 74 Interview Maria Pieters (born 1880), Brenneker/Juliana, 1960 (Zikinzá-collection, T 247, NatAr).
- 75 Kerstgeschenk 1883:186.
- 76 Latour 1952:71. Irus 1910:67.
- 77 Migration inspired people to make songs illustrating the intensity of the event. These purveyed important information about the way people experienced migration. Thus these songs are important information transmitters and most people of the older generations recall them more readily than any other information.
- 78 Interview Florita Reinila (date of birth not registered), Brenneker/Juliana, 1958 (Zikinzá-collection, T 79, NatAr).
- 79 This proverb is generally used to indicate that someone is ungrateful.
- 80 *La Cruz*, 4-12-1901.
- 81 These were burial funds (*sitter*), established in the nineteenth century by the Roman Catholic Church. Members would pay a weekly contribution, which would be registered in a special exercise book (*buki di sitter*).
- 82 Latour (1952:24).
- 83 Interview Felipi Sambo (born 1906), Brenneker/Juliana, 1960 (T 30, Fundashon Biblioteka Públiko Kòrsou).
- 84 Interview Seferina Valks (born 1903), Allen, 8-9-1983 (NatAr).



CHAPTER VII

Buska Bida: Making a Living

Post-emancipation Curaçao was a heterogeneous society, comprising a variety of racial and ethnic groups unequal in terms of wealth, status and power. In this society, economic standing followed colour lines with power lying in the hands of a select group (Hoetink 1987; Römer 1979). For the most part Afro-Curaçaoans lacked power, both economically and politically. The key question I will seek to answer in this and the following two Chapters is: how did these factors affect the everyday lives of the freedpeople?

Scholars have intensively studied the daily life of subjugated people. Holger Henke (2004) stresses the necessity of uncovering the everyday life of people in the Caribbean, as it holds the sources of Caribbean thought. For Henke, the difficulty in researching daily life revolves around finding out what people find relevant in their lives and give significance to. Should everyday life be studied as 'a sequence of dull and ordinary acts and products' or as the 'extraordinary or bizarre' in people's lives? Either approach presents a challenge. In the first, every type of activity can be considered part of daily life, thus leading to an abundance of data. The second approach confronts us with the question of how to relate the extraordinary and bizarre to recurring cultural activities and behaviour patterns (2004:3). At an earlier stage the cultural philosopher Michael de Certeau also emphasized the importance of studying day-to-day life in his book *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980). De Certeau states that daily life should not be conceived as 'merely the obscure background of social activity' and therefore be concealed. Instead, it is necessary to 'penetrate this obscurity and to "articulate" it' (1980:4).

I will explore how, following emancipation, Afro-Curaçaoans lived their daily lives and how they went about this within the parameters of the two key institutions with power: the State and the Roman Catholic Church. I will look at how, despite their subjugated status, they were able to become important arbiters in managing their lives. The question I will seek to answer is: in what ways did they try to give meaning to their daily existence in a material, social and spiritual sense? Answering this question requires insight into the actions taken by men and women in their attempt to take control of their lives within the boundaries of the power system. In that sense I will address the interrelationship between power and culture in an attempt to answer the much larger question of how culture revealed itself in the everyday lives of Afro-Curaçaoans.

Understanding Afro-Curaçaoan Everyday Life

Using the concept of *bida*, here and in the following two Chapters, I will focus on the dynamics of Afro-Curaçaoans' material, social and spiritual lives. *Bida* simply means life and is used in connection with many different aspects of people's daily lives. In trying to comprehend post-emancipation everyday life of Afro-Curaçaoans, certain issues need to be considered. After 1863 the Roman Catholic Church and the State introduced several mechanisms of social control. The Church in particular played an important role in attempting to change the Afro-Curaçaoans' ways of life, with the goal of creating, through Catholicism, a type of culture considered civilized and respectable.

These processes of cultural influence emanating from the existing power relationship between former slaves on the one hand and former masters, the Church and the State on the other, made the lives of Afro-Curaçaoans ever more complex. We then see a similar phenomenon taking place as elsewhere in the Caribbean: the attempt of a small group of Afro-Curaçaoans, forming part of an emerging coloured middle class, to adapt as much as possible to this culture of respectability. The greater part of this group lived in town, in neighbourhoods such as Otrobanda and Punda, with some holding positions in commerce. This group looked down on those lacking the same degree of culture and respectability and would voice this in many ways.

The land on which one lived was an important marker of social standing among Afro-Curaçaoans. Firstly, a division existed between town (Punda and Otrobanda) and the kunuku: Banda Bou (western countryside) and Banda Riba (eastern countryside).¹ Those living in town emphasized their cunning and bravery to distinguish themselves from those in the countryside. The *hende di Punda*, as they called themselves, differed from the *hende di kunuku* in the way that the former were believed to be cunning and brave while the latter were thought of as being docile, submissive and even stupid. In the interviews I conducted, people would use the term 'muchu di Punda, mi ta' (I am a child of Punda) to explain why they had behaved in a brave way or had been able to outwit those with power.

People from the kunuku were also considered to be less respectable than those in town. For example, they were labelled as talking too loudly and in an uncivilized manner. Their Papiamentu was coarse ('Papia manera hende di kunuku').² However, people from town also thought fondly of the kunuku. And there was an underlying respect for the people living there. It was, for example, commonly known that in the kunuku there continued the practice of traditional cures and use of medicinal plants. For example Ma Yaya Felipa, born around 1870, who lived in Barber (Banda Bou), was widely known for her capacity to cure people; her reputation attracted many visitors from town.³

Secondly, there was the division between the two parts of the kunuku: Banda Riba (in the east) and Banda Bou (in the west). Already before emancipation, a large group had been able to live as freedpeople in the kunuku, using the social opportunities available to them. Many of them lived in Banda Riba, which was nearer to town. In contrast, most of those freed in 1863 lived in Banda Bou. Hoetink (1958:84) writes that Afro-Curaçaoans classified themselves according to whether they were descendants of slaves freed before or in 1863. During interviews, people often emphasized that they did not descend from slaves. Some would pride themselves in their light complexion. An interviewee born in 1878 related with great satisfaction to Paul Brenneker: 'Mi tata no tabata katibu. Nos aki

no ta salí di katibu, pero ela biba i kasa den tempu di katibu' (My father was not a slave. We are not descendants of slaves, but my father lived and married during the period of slavery).⁴

Most of the data in this and the following two Chapters come from oral sources, as they have been the primary tool by which people expressed their day-to-day experiences. At the time, Afro-Curaçaoans formed an oral-based community, communicating their personal and communal concerns principally in an oral form, especially through songs sung during work and leisure, which were an outlet of communal and individual release, as well as a vehicle for expressing joy, anger and protest. It was not until the beginning of the twentieth century that a small group of Afro-Curaçaoans began expressing themselves in prose, mainly written in Papiamentu.⁵

Daily Life and the Search for Land

In the Caribbean the limited availability of land has always been an issue. Engerman affirms that land, besides the scarcity of labour, has been a key constraint on economic opportunities in most Caribbean countries. He further argues that many scholars have approached the subject of land supply in the region from an economic perspective. They examined post-1863 land-labour ratios and land ownership in order to explain the varying outcomes of emancipation in terms of changes in plantation output, non-plantation opportunities open to former slaves, their standards of living, and even the success of political control in influencing the distribution of incomes among members of these societies (1992:58). Renkema's study of plantation life on Curaçao (1981a) has added a new dimension to the understanding of land use before and after emancipation as he addressed questions regarding the provision of land on the island and also examined the restrictions placed on blacks in attaining a piece of land.

A close examination of the written documents reveals the enormous desire for land among Afro-Curaçaoans in the first years following emancipation. For Afro-Curaçaoans land was a symbol of one's personal identity. People would be identified by the land on which they lived.⁶ They would often refer to the piece of land where they were born as part of their identity. Interviewees would for example say 'Mi lombrishi ta derá na Dain' (My navel is buried in Dain (Daniel)), thus symbolically referring to the place in which one was born and grew up.⁷ Others would say: 'Mi ta hende di Sabaneta' (I am a person of Savaneta), 'Mi ta hende di Montaña' (I am a person of Montaña) or 'Mi ta mucha di Otrobanda' (I am a child of Otrobanda) etc – the last ('mucha') expressing an emotional relationship with one's place of birth.

The desire among Afro-Curaçaoans to own land was addressed in their oral tradition. The following part of a Nanzi story, for example, reveals three themes: 1) land is an important subject, 2) Nanzi acknowledges the power of the authorities – in this case of shon Arei – in the distribution of land, and 3) he sees land as a solution to his impoverished position:

One day Nanzi and his wife had no food to feed themselves and their nine children. Nanzi knew all kinds of tricks and he decided to go to shon Arei (master king) to see how he could wheedle a piece of land out of him. He went to the king's palace and said: Oh good master king, you are very powerful and generous. You alone can help me. I am as poor as a church mouse. I have to look after my wife and nine innocent creatures. I am running out of money. Shon Arei, for God's sake, improve my lot, give me a piece of ground so that I may plant something (Baart 1983:101; Wood 1972:48).

As the story continues Nanzi again uses his notorious wits to acquire a piece of land. He asks shon Arei for a piece as big as a cow's hide, to which shon Arei agrees. Nanzi then buys a cowskin and at home cuts it into thirty narrow strips. Following this, he, his wife Shi Maria and daughter Pegasaja select a good piece of land. The next day Nanzi leaves home with a long rope made of this cowskin to mark out the area. The king is surprised by the size of the land but eventually concedes that once again Nanzi has managed to outwit him.⁸

In reality it was not quite so easy to acquire a piece of land. Several factors constrained the land available to free Afro-Curaçaoans. For a long time the decision about whether a person could attain a plot was in the hands of the former slave-masters, together with the ruling class. As noted in Chapter V, those who continued living on the plantations in the paga tera system remained dependent on the whims of the owners. However, the process of leaving the plantation was hindered not only by limited economic opportunities and the poor ecological environment, but also by several regulations and laws. Only those without plantation work had a chance of renting a piece of land from the government.⁹ If one already had work and a place to live on a plantation, permission would be refused.

Those under this category would be considered 'wanting to act on one's own' or 'trying to become too independent'. This motivation for a refusal once again indicates that the State and the plantation owners shared common values, determining their relationship and interactions with the black population. Upon receiving a petition, the relevant district master would inquire as to whether the plantation owners in the surrounding area had any objections against handing out the requested land. Any objection would result in the petition being turned down. This regulation was applied both in the eastern and western districts. This happened, for example, to Mathias Apostel, who in 1874 requested a piece of government land south of plantation Sint Joris, where he worked and lived, for agricultural purposes and to build a house. The district master turned down the request because he considered Apostel's wish to live on his own an indication of him wanting to detach himself from the plantation where he lived. The district master was also against the working class acquiring large parcels of land close to plantations.¹⁰

Clementina Loop's request in 1876 for a piece of government land on *Montaña di Rei* to build a straw hut with kitchen and a corn storage for her and her children was also turned down on these grounds. The district master's argument was that the petitioner already possessed a spacious home on the plantation of Jan Zoutvat, where she had been living for a long time.¹¹ This practice of control persisted in the western part of the island into the twentieth century.

Sometimes petitioners disagreeing with the refusal would openly show their discontent. Such was the case in 1864, when a group of former enslaved and free people living on

plantation Engelenberg in Banda Bou petitioned for a piece of land. Their request to settle on the government ground called Pannekoek was granted. However, this decision met with a hostile reaction from the plantation owners, who feared an overcrowding in the locality. When the district master wanted to withdraw his decision based on this objection, the spokesperson of the group came forward and claimed 'that they had submitted their petition with due respect for the authorities, but if the granted permit were to be withdrawn, they would move away, even leaving the country as they no longer had to comply with the wishes of the plantation owners'. Subsequently, they were given the piece of land.¹² In most cases, however, plantation owners succeeded in curbing the independence of former slaves, sometimes with the law on their side.

Land issues seldom took the form of overt rebellion against plantation owners and State authorities. Apart from stressing their lawful rights, Afro-Curaçaoans undermined those in authority in various ways on a daily basis. For example, in the report of 1864 by the master of the third district to the Procurator of the King regarding harvest and animal husbandry, he reported that part of the plantations' harvest was lost due to workers having been too busy working their own land, having refused to work for others, or having worked very slowly.¹³

While the plantation owners were against freedmen leaving the plantation, for the black working class it meant 'sali for di bou di pia di shon' (coming out from under the feet of the shon). Some acknowledged that they had become tired of always having to bow their heads for the shons ('Baha kabes pa shon'). Indeed, over time, an increasing number of people wanted to be free of the shon and rent a piece of land from the government.

The finance administrator for the colony of Curaçao stated in a letter to all district masters dated 29 May 1885 that the petitions by plantation labourers for renting or buying land had increased.¹⁴ In an article written fourteen years later the same administrator looked back and argued that in that way the black population wanted to free itself from this state of dependence (de Veer 1899:329). Even into the twentieth century those who had stayed on the plantations would continuously use the threat to leave as a tool of resisting the power of the owner. In 1909 a plantation owner complained that his black workers were behaving in an independent manner and that he could not always get them to work. He also pointed out that at the slightest reproach on his part, they threatened to leave his plantation and rent a piece of government land instead.¹⁵

As a result of increasing pressure by the working class, around 1885 more and more land began to be distributed by the government. In order to avoid antagonizing the plantation owners, the State initially handed out land well away from the plantations.¹⁶ Later on, however, the State would buy land from owners whose plantations had become economically unviable. This was distributed to the freedmen, in order to create an independent peasantry.

Much to the anger of the plantation owners, living on government land gave people a sense of independence. In 1890 the owner of Savaneta (Savonet) complained in a letter that the State had rented out 48 pieces of land near his plantation, in Westpunt. As a result, he felt he could not let his animals graze on the land, or take material from there for burning his chalk-oven. He was also angered by the fact that people were keeping more animals than allowed. His hostile feelings, however, also stemmed from being confronted with

people who disobeyed his orders. He felt that the people in Westpunt instigated those living on his plantation. As an example he cited that when he had refused permission to dance the *tambú* on his land, they had danced in the middle of the public road, arguing that this was a free place for everyone.¹⁷

Savaneta was one of the most enterprising plantations on the island. It had one of the largest livestock and its average annual agricultural yield was the highest on the island, providing work for many people (Renkema 1981a:248; Spanjers 1981:10). As a result it was also one of the few plantations that did not see a transient workforce. As the following Table shows, the population increased rather than decreased over the years.

Table 7.1 Number of Inhabitants, Huts and Stone Houses on Plantation Savaneta, 1864-1899

Year	Population	Huts and Stone Houses
1864	337	80 + 29
1868	389	143 + 34
1876	408	80 + 34
1884	405	No data
1891	396	172 + 35
1899	452	138 + 32

Source: Renkema 1981a:155

However, it was also a plantation where people continually complained about the owners in oral narratives. Studies by Brenneker and Juliana, Leon Weeber (2004, on this specific plantation) and myself, contain several narratives with complaints about the autocratic behaviour of the owners. In the following part of an interview collected by Brenneker and Juliana the informant looks back on a childhood experience involving the owner. As a small child he sometimes stayed with his grandparents, who lived on Savaneta. His parents lived on free government land. When he compared this with life on the plantation he emphasized the dominance of the land owner and the way the people responded to this.

Ami tabata un mucha nasé riba Westpunt. Mi mama ta di Sabaneta. Mi tata di Westpunt. Mi tawela tabata fitó den hòfi di Sabaneta. Mi tabata e promé nietu, di un di su yunan. Un dia, mi a mira un mespel ku a kai for di palu. Ora mi ta bai kue pa bai kome e mespel mi a mira shon Harry. Nos tabata yam'é, shon Harry. Ora el a mirami ku e mespel, e di ku mi: 'Ta ki bo tin den bo man?' Mi di kuné: 'Ta un mespel mi a haña bou di palu, shon.' E di ku mi: 'Tres'é p'ami.' Ku su garoti, el a bula riba mi, saka p'aya banda. Mi a sali na kareda. Ora

*I am a child born in Westpunt. My mother is from Savaneta. My father from Westpunt. My grandfather was an overseer in the orchard of Savaneta. I was the first grandchild. One day I saw a medlar (*Mespilus germanica*), that had fallen from the tree. When I went to eat it I saw shon Harry. We used to call him shon Harry. When he saw me with the mespel, he asked me: 'What do you have in your hand?' I told him: 'It is a mespel which I found under the tree, sir.' He told me: 'Bring it here to me.' With his cane, he jumped on me, and then sprang to the other*

mi a sali na kareda, el a bentami un palu. Mi a haña un piedra i mi a bent'é un piedra. Mi a bula waya, un kareda te Westpunt. Mi a bai laga mi tawela riba Sabaneta. Anto ora su manisé, mi tawela a puntra, si mi tabata riba Westpunt. Mi mama di ku sí. Anto el a manda yamami, anto ora mi a bini. E di: 'Mi yu, ta kiko a pasabo?' Mi di, asina asina tata, pasó asina mi tabata yama mi tawela, tata. 'Bo no por a bini bin bisami?' Mi di: 'Nò tata, paso e hòmber tabata ku su garoti. M'a benta un piedra riba dje, tata. Wèl awor mi no ke pa e mirami.' E di: 'Mi yu, bo a benta e piedra?' Mi di kuné: 'Sí.' E di: 'Ai Dios.' Pasó tur hende tabatin miedu di shon. Antes... pasó si bo bisa un kos di shon, ya tur hende ta haña doló di barika, mara sintura. Ta shon. Ami no tabatin miedu pasó mi tabata mucha. Rèspèt sí. Nunka niun hende a bisa mi wovo ta pretu, ma miedu di shon mi no tabatin, pasó m'a nase riba Westpunt. Mi ta di Westpunt. Mi mama di Sabaneta. Wèl mi no tabatin miedu di shon. El a manda bisa mi tawela, tresémi pa e batimi. Mi tawela di kuné, nò mi no ta biba den Sabaneta. Mi tawela no por hibami pa e batimi.¹⁸

side. I started to run. When I started to run, he threw a piece of wood at me. I found a stone and I threw the stone at him. Then I jumped the fence, and ran straight to Westpunt. I left my grandfather on Savaneta. The next day, my grandfather asked whether I was in Westpunt. My mother told him yes. He sent for me, and when I came, he said: 'My child, what happened to you?' I told him: 'Tata [father, because I used to call him tata]. I said: Tata, so and so happened.' 'Why didn't you come and tell me?' I said: 'No tata, because the man had his cane. I threw a stone at him. Now I don't want him to see me.' He said: 'My child, did you throw a stone at him?' I said: 'Yes.' He said: 'Oh my God.' Because everybody was afraid of the shon. Formerly when people said something about the shon, everybody would get pain in their belly and would tie their waist. Because it is the shon. I was not afraid of the shon. I had respect, of course. No one could say that my eyes are black (that I don't show respect to people), but I was not afraid of the shon, because I was born on Westpunt. I am from Westpunt. My mother was from Savaneta. Well I was not afraid of the shon. He told my grandfather to bring me so he can beat me. My grandfather told him that I did not live on Savaneta. My grandfather could not take me to him so he could beat me.

This story demonstrates the perception of levels of freedom depending on where one lived. The informant was born after emancipation. Even as a small child he was aware of the different attitudes of those living on the plantation and those living on government land. The latter had a sense of control of time, labour, one's own life and that of the family. Over time, plantation owners sensed this all-pervading notion of autonomy among the inhabitants of government land. The owner of Savaneta complained in a letter about how people from Westpunt used to sell him their dividivi beans for thirty cents, but now refused to do so as they could sell them for four times this amount to another plantation owner.¹⁹ With their new-found freedom people made good use of the existing rivalries between plantation owners.

Geertruda Alberto, also called Ma Tuda, born in 1883 in the same community as the previous informant, saw access to land outside the plantation as a means of achieving more independence from the oppressive supervision previously experienced. It gave her a greater degree of dignity and control of her own life and that of her family. She articulated this sense of control as follows:

*Mi no a traha pa shon, ni mi kasá tampoko, pasó Westpunt no ta tera di shon. Westpunt ta tera di gobièrnu. Niun hende riba e pida tereno ei no tin un shon. Tur hende ta liber!*²⁰

I did not work for the shon, neither did my husband, because Westpunt does not belong to a plantation owner. Westpunt is government land. Nobody on that piece of land has an owner. Everyone is free!

People felt that living on government land provided them with certain privileges. For example, Martili²¹ answered back to a plantation owner who had forbidden him to gather wood from his land. Martili replied by saying that he had not taken wood from his plantation, but rather from the nearby government land.²²

However, this perception of being free on government land was not entirely correct. For example, the tenants were not allowed to sell liquor on these plots. This rule affected women in particular, as they would often sell small quantities of rum (*un mushi di rom*) in calabashes (*gobi*) to make a living. They were not allowed to organize a *tambú* gathering on the land and were restricted to keeping only two donkeys and five goats to be tethered at all times. In 1870 stricter laws were introduced regarding the number of animals allowed and they had to carry an eartag. Sometimes animals would be shot if they strayed onto plantation land.²³

According to Renkema, the increased acquisition of government land led to the emergence of a peasantry farming small plots of land. This was particularly the case in the eastern countryside, where no elaborate *paga tera* system existed (1981a:156-7). In the west, where this system prevailed, relatively small plots were owned. In some cases people living on government land would make an agreement with neighbouring plantation owners about a plot for subsistence farming. For example, some people in Westpunt had a plot on Savaneta or on plantation Knip to practice agriculture; or people of the village of Willibrordus would have a piece of land on plantation Porto Mari. All of this fell under the *paga tera* system.

Related to this land issue was the common problem of obtaining water. Since most wells were located on plantations, initially there were not enough wells on government land. The previously mentioned Ma Tuda described how this affected her life when she was a small child.

*Mi mama ku mi tata ta hende di Sabaneta. Despues nos a roi tera, ei riba sabana bin biba afó. Mashá pena nos a pasa, traha trabou mashá duru. Na bo kabes bo tin di karga awa. Serka di Sabaneta tabatin un pos. Su awa ta dushi. Te'i nos a forma bibá, bai pidi pa koba un buraku pa saka awa. Pasó n' ta'tin pos, ni e shon di Sabaneta no tabata duna awa na niun hende ku no ta biba den su kunuku. Asina nos a biba, pasa trabou.*²⁴

My father and mother are from plantation Savaneta. Afterwards we marked out a piece of land and came to live outside the plantation. Life was hard. We had to work very hard. You had to carry water on your head. In the neighbourhood of Savaneta there was a well. There the water was sweet. It was there that we dug a well. Because [where we went to live] there were no wells, and the owners of the plantation of Savaneta did not give water to anyone who did not live on their plantation. So we lived a troubled life.

Government land was usually given out for a finite period of time and allocated to a certain person. The rent was determined according to the land's production potential, which also served as a form of labour control. It meant that those not working hard enough would be unable to pay the rent and were subsequently evicted. This was also applied in the opposite scenario: those with more produce than the potential of their land could be accused of theft. Thus it is not surprising that farmers were reluctant to give the district masters the correct amount of produce harvested. A commissioner of the second district mentioned this practice in an overview of the harvest of maize, beans and peanuts in his district. He assessed the shortfall by comparing the weight of the maize to the size of the cultivated field. He lamented that it was not possible to do the same for the beans, peanuts and vine fruits.²⁵

People tried to circumvent this State interference by persisting in their requests to buy a piece of land. As land owners, they would enjoy certain advantages and not fall under the restrictive State measures. But most requests were refused. Those who managed to gain ownership would often resell the land.²⁶

In the face of scarcity, land served as a primary symbol of personal identity, prestige, security and freedom. Its significance could often be interpreted from names such as *Bida Largu* (Long life), *Comfortabel* (Comfortable), *Deseo* (Wish), *Fe* (Faith), *Esperanza* (Hope) and *Paciencia* (Patience). Even the plots on plantations were given names. It is also through land that historical knowledge about families and communities was transmitted from generation to generation.

The following survey carried out in 1906, recording land rented from the State, gives an indication of land distribution by the government in the beginning of the twentieth century. The second district had by far the highest number of rented plots. There, much land had already been handed out to those freed before 1863. Following emancipation, land would continue to be distributed, unhindered by the plantation owners, this being the case in the fourth and fifth district until 1885 (Renkema 1981a:157). In the second and third district the parcels of land were small in comparison to those in the western fourth and fifth districts.

Table 7.2 Number of Plots Rented From the Government, 1906

	Second district	Third district	Fourth district	Fifth district
Number of rented plots	862	299	75	90

Source: Extract uit het Verslag onderzoek in pacht uitgegeven landgronden op Curaçao, Koloniale Verslagen 1906, bijlage O

Living on the Sabana

As was the case elsewhere in the Caribbean, freedpeople on Curaçao who were unable to rent or buy a plot of land would squat outside the plantations.²⁷ These pieces were called

sabana and were used as grazing land for the cattle of plantation owners, who had received this privilege by tradition from the Dutch West Indian Company. Following emancipation, the owners would change this privilege into a right of ownership (Renkema 1981a:144-5). Among the squatters were Afro-Curaçaoan men and women who had been refused a piece of land on the grounds that their behaviour was not considered good. They had, for example, been chased away from the plantations or from government land, or they were people wanting a plot of their own and therefore simply squatted the land where the planters grazed their animals.

This trend was not new: prior to emancipation squatters had already been living on these grazing lands. With emancipation approaching, a plantation owner urged the State to sell him the land near his plantation in order to keep this group well away. He expected much animal theft after emancipation. His request was granted.²⁸ With the increase of squatters after 1863, tension heightened, with plantation owners categorizing the squatters as thieves and lazy people. They were accused of allowing their animals to break the plantation fences so that they could eat the maize; of stealing animals from the plantations; of keeping more animals than allowed; of cutting wood to burn for charcoal; of selling liquor and stolen goods; and of keeping the detested tambú dance on their land. Over time, these complaints flared up and plantation owners directed letters to the government to take action. In 1867 for example, again two plantation owners urged the State to sell them the land near their plantation in order to keep this group away.²⁹

The master of the second district, J. Ferguson, also focused on this attitude a few weeks before freedom. He objected to the pattern of squatting and observed that more and more freedpeople were building their houses at random near public roads. He felt compelled to put forward the following advice to the colonial authorities:

The several circumstances which I have observed since accepting my present position, have led me to take the liberty to come with several proposals regarding the administration of the police in my district. The first issue regards the social life of the inhabitants and their way of settling down in this district. On both sides of the public roads, people are building houses on pieces of land. These houses are built with special permission from the government, under the strict condition that the inhabitants will not fence them and that they will not sell liquor there. But most of the time even with the greatest effort by the national police, these irregularities cannot be stopped or prevented. In view of the forthcoming emancipation, when in this district about 1,200 people will become free citizens, it would be desirable to establish villages so that they can learn the basics of moral life.³⁰

This urge to form orderly communities was also in the interest of the Church, as it would afford the priests more control of parishioners. The Church possessed land in the western countryside of Barber and Buitenbosch. It was also active in preventing people from being dispersed. For example, when a certain family tried to gain ownership of a larger plot which would displace other families living on the same land, the priest of the parish protested against this on behalf of these families. The dispersion of relatives was something to be avoided prior to emancipation.³¹

After 1863, the main institutions of society were confronted with the problem of how to continue exercising social control on the lives of Afro-Curaçaoans. A district master drew attention to the urgency of this in view of what he believed to be lacking in their character. He wrote that:

They are slow and indifferent and rarely work with the aim of improving their situation. If only they can satisfy their immediate needs they are content. Most of the time, they would steal in order to satisfy their immediate needs. This is due to them living outside of any community on the savannas. This dispersion will only stimulate lazy behaviour and theft.

According to the district master an orderly community life should be stimulated as a form of fostering civilized behaviour among the squatters. He argued that in this way:

One could not eliminate laziness and theft with all force as long as these people lived outside of any community on the savanna. They would never become civilized as they cannot be controlled properly.³²

His fear was that this cycle would be perpetuated as this behaviour of lawlessness would be copied by their children. 'Presently', he continued, 'even their young children are contaminated by this behaviour, as their parents do not set a good example.' He proposed a law aimed at knocking down all illegally built houses on the savannas. The head of each family would then receive a piece of land from the State where they could settle and form villages.

Over time, squatting on the savannas became a thorn in the side of the district masters, who would repeatedly complain about the uncontrollable agglomeration of huts.³³ The principal argument of those with power was that blacks were not equipped for freedom and that they needed some kind of external control. Encouraging them to live in a community, where the Church could play a central role and exercise better social control of their lives was the favoured solution and was supported by plantation owners. In addition, objections against these inhabitants originated from owners fearing that a group of independent peasants would arise, resulting in a loss of workers on their plantations (Renkema 1981a:144).

As far as land was concerned, the sabana were by definition of very little agricultural interest since they could barely support subsistence farming. At an earlier stage they had been left by the plantation owners who had instead chosen the land with better opportunities for cultivation. The inferiority of these plots is well expressed in the following song, in which a woman scoffs at a man who has stolen a goatskin because he does not have a farm or even a sabana.

*Domatí, bo n' tin kunuku
Domatí, bo n' tin sabana
Domatí, ai ta nada bo no tin
Domatí, pone paki kuero abou*

*Domatí, you don't have a farm
Domatí, you don't have a grassland
Domatí, oh you don't have anything at all
Domatí, put that packet of goatskin down*

In their everyday lives these *hende di den sabana* (people of the sabana) opposed to or fell short of many existing rules and regulations in society. Popularly the name 'hende di den sabana' became a synonym for a disorderly and uncivilized person. Yet some people who lived on this land would pride themselves on this. They upheld the perception that they were people who could defy those with authority. Those living in the *sabana* served as models for the former slaves who had gained freedom under the worst conditions, being left to fend for themselves.

Tera di Famia: Family Land

An important phenomenon surrounding land acquisition was that of family land. This has been much studied by scholars of the Caribbean, such as Clarke (1957), Mintz (1974), Besson (1992) and Thornburg (1990). Mintz (1974:155) characterizes the value attached to family land as an expression of westernization and of resistance to imposed socio-economic styles of life. Besson refers to this as a paradox in attitude by Afro-Caribbean peasantries. Family land is both extremely scarce and at the same time an unlimited resource. According to Besson, the preservation of family land is a response to inequality. People reacted to unequal relationships by creating and perpetuating the institution of family land (1990:202).

John Carter Thornburg defines family land as inalienable and undivided inherited land by all blood relations of the original owner. According to him, based on its inalienable nature, group-decision making structures, equal access and use by all heirs of the founding ancestor, it could be seen as an adaptive strategy to overcome the disadvantages of socio-economic conditions, such as land scarcity, determined by slavery and the plantation system (1990:1, 94).

Curaçao too knew the phenomenon of family land. Family plots were either pieces given to a slave by a benevolent master or had been bought by the people themselves. An interesting case of family land in the western part of the country was a plot purchased by a woman after she had bought the freedom of the man who she then married. After the death of her husband on 13 May 1859 at the age of 78, the land was divided among their ten children as family land. This became important family land in the west. As a result of the sense of power this land afforded them, the owners would be in constant conflict with the district master and surrounding plantation owners regarding the so-called transportation tickets: they carried more produce to sell in town than was legally allowed. They flouted the rules and kept more animals than was permitted. However, they also had status and were considered respectable by the other members of their community. The eldest member of this family was constantly requested to sign the death register as a witness when someone in the community had died, even though he could neither read nor write.³⁴

As elsewhere in the Caribbean family land was a plot shared with other co-owning family members while the individual inherited only rights of access and use, not exclusive possession. It did not recognize individual ownership. Family land entailed that the direct descendants would hold an equal share in the property, whether or not they were residing on the land. Some people did not live there, but still shared in the ownership. In these cases

they also referred to it as their piece of land (Henriquez 1969:85). The transfer of family land was extra-legal, accomplished without a will and usually without title (Thornburg 1992:94). It was mostly an oral agreement at the deathbed of the head of the family, whereby the surviving kin had to uphold the wishes of the deceased, in accordance with the tradition that one should always comply with the wishes of the dead.

One of the first people to study the phenomenon of family land on Curaçao was the lawyer E.C. Henriquez (1969). In his profession Henriquez was confronted with the legal obstacles people encountered when wanting to sell their plots of family land in the 1960s, at a time when prices were increasing. In these cases all biological descendants would claim to be entitled to the estate even though they had difficulty in proving that they descended from the original owner (Henriquez 1969:85). Being the direct descendants of enslaved people, they sometimes had problems in making a legal claim to the land, since slaves were not legally allowed to own land. This would also constitute a problem if in the past the ancestor had failed to recognize his children or in case the children were born out of wedlock. Under Dutch Civil Code, the mother also had to recognize her children so that they could claim lineage from her. As this seldom happened, many of these children could not prove their legal descent.

Thornburg (1990:94) comments that when looking at family land from a legal point of view, it is indeed thought to create conditions of uncertainty and insecurity with regards to owning and farming. However, family land held symbolic value for the people who claimed ownership and was central in identity construction. Its symbolic value for its owners is expressed in the following statement by Eduardo Tokaai, whose family land was in Banda Bou.

*Mi tata ta di Soto. Mi mama ta di Soto. Mi mama ta hende di Seru Saré. Nos akinan ta hende di Seru Saré. Bo sa Seru Saré banda di misa di Barber. Seru Saré no ta tera di gobièrnu, ta tera di famia. Nos no ta vende niun hende ku no ta famia niun pida tera.*³⁵

My father is from Soto. My grandmother is from Soto. My mother is from Seru Saré. We here, are Seru Saré people. You know, Seru Saré, close to the church of Barber. Seru Saré is not government land. It is family land. We do not sell any piece of land to anybody who does not belong to our family.

Agriculture: Life's Sustenance

Arable farming was one way for Afro-Curaçaoans to make a living. The term *kome di tera* (to eat from the land), indicates a bond with the land as a food-providing entity. After emancipation, millet continued to be the primary crop. Clearing, planting, weeding and harvesting the millet were important aspects of farming and determined people's daily lives.

Cultivating arable land began after the rainy season in September. Labour was primarily sourced from members of the household. If additional labour was required workers could be brought in, being paid in cash or a reciprocal arrangement was made.³⁶ In the ideal situation, with a male present, he presided over the course of agricultural work.

Women and children would participate in all phases. The division of labour during planting was as follows: a man walked along a line and at each step dug a hole with his hoe, while the woman and children followed and dropped millet and pumpkin seeds as well as beans into the holes. The number and composition of the household determined how much land could be cultivated.

The following statement gives an example of how working the land controlled the day's schedule and shows the role all household members played in this:

Mi tata tabata bai drumi den mondi³⁷ grandi, ora nan tabata rosa pida tera pa planta. Ora e ta bai traha kunuku, e ta bai drumi einan. Mainta ku promé kanto di para, nos ta lanta. Tempu ku papa ta'a tini kunuku, nos tabata yuda papa planta, yena buraku. Tata ta koba buraku i nos ta buta un sinku pipita di maishi, un di patia, un di pampuna (Cucurbita maxima), i dos bonchi aden.³⁸

My father used to go to sleep in the bushes, when the land had to be cleared for planting. When he would work the land, he would go and sleep there. In the morning with the first birds, we would wake up. When my father worked the land, we would help him with planting by throwing seeds into the holes. Father would dig the holes and we would drop in them about five seeds of maize, one seed of the watermelon and one of the pumpkin (Cucurbita maxima) and two beans.

The process of planting was called *traha kunuku* (to work the land). *Traha*, in this context 'to work', indicates the amount of effort undertaken in clearing the land for planting. 'Traha kunuku' had a stronger meaning than 'tene kunuku', a term referring to the possession of a piece of land.

It is clear that agricultural work was not restricted to males. In households without a male head of the family, women would usually perform tasks typically performed by males and clear the land themselves.³⁹ This was also the case, for example, if the male was working abroad or in town. If funds were available a man might be hired to dig the holes. Maria Martina married Antersijn, born in 1910, recalled that when she was a little girl her mother used to pay a man sixty cents per day to work her land after her husband had left to work in Aruba. In this case, her mother sold the crop surplus. The hired worker had to be someone with a good knowledge of planting, to ensure a successful crop which could be sold in town.⁴⁰

With respect to tools, most farmers only owned a hoe. This was a simple tool identical in design to the one their forefathers had used during slavery and in Africa. Instruments like plows were rare, even on the plantations, except for Savaneta. With the hoe, the workers broke and aerated the soil (*drecha tera*), dug holes one foot apart – they gauged the distance using their own foot – into which they dropped different types of seed. Into one hole the millet and pumpkin seeds were dropped together with beans. This multi-cropping technique served as a type of soil management but was criticized by agriculturalists brought in from the Netherlands in the beginning of the twentieth century. They considered this method of planting chaotic and unbeneficial and added that even white planters had adopted this method. This shows that cultural contact between those dominating and those subjugated was not always one-way and top-down. The agriculturalists gave

recommendations on improving planting methods.⁴¹ However, as they described other aspects of life of the lower class in a negative sense, they were criticized by the Roman Catholic clergy.⁴²

Some elderly Afro-Curaçaoans stated in conversations that by planting in this manner, the most fertile land – where the earth was cold (*tera frieu*) – could be best utilized. While the millet would grow tall, the bean twines would wrap themselves around the stalks and the pumpkins or melon plants would trail across the ground. Other crops planted were peanuts and sometimes sweet potatoes. One could plant peanuts in November and harvest the fruits within three months. Peanuts were an important ingredient for the *mangusa*, a meal also consisting of beans and millet. In the beginning of the twentieth century peanuts were sold for twenty cents a liter and they were eaten boiled or roasted as a snack. They were also an important ingredient for sweet cakes, a delicacy sold in small shops (Benjamins en Snelleman 1914-1917:26).

Millet was a challenging crop to grow. The farmer was faced with different problems, requiring a great deal of time and energy. Marijke Steegstra in her book *Resilient Rituals* (2004) on the function of millet in rituals, quotes the Ghanian scholar C.K. Ayi (1966), who remarks that ‘although millet is superior dietetically to maize, it is a more uncertain crop for it is difficult to protect from birds and shows small returns for more bulk and labour’ (2004:176). This was also the case for Curaçao. Great care was necessary for the plants to survive until harvest time. While growing, the millet had to be hoed and protected from insects, pests, weeds and, towards the end, birds, which could damage an entire crop. In March or April the millet would be harvested.

The seasonal rhythm of a farmer’s life was determined by the succession of tasks regarding the cultivation of millet. The division of time was based on the following farming calendar:

Table 7.3 Calendar Organized Around Cultivating Millet

Month	Activities
June	Dry season (<i>drecha kunuku</i>). Clearing and breaking the piece of land of the kunuku with a hoe.
July	Dry season (<i>drecha kunuku</i>). Clearing and breaking the piece of land of the kunuku with a hoe.
August	August rains. Most planters would not begin to plant with this rain, as it would not always last, resulting in the new plants being scorched by the sun.
September	September rain, the true rain for planting.
October	Planting millet, climbing-beans, pumpkins, peanuts.
November	Weeding and taking care of the kunuku.
December	The millet grows. The struggle against insects, worms, mosquitoes and <i>Ustilago</i> . ⁴³
January	Ensuring that the millet stalks do not drop. Chasing away the birds.
February	Ensuring that the millet stalks do not drop. Chasing away the birds.
March	Harvesting the millet and storing it.

April	Harvesting the millet and storing it.
May	The remaining millet stalks with leaves are left to dry in the field, after which they are cut, stacked and saved (or sold) as food for animals.

Source: Benjamins, 1914-1917:457 and oral interviews

Farmers were at the mercy of nature and constantly faced the fact that natural circumstances were not always favourable for arable farming. Even those who criticized Afro-Curaçaoans for being lazy, had to admit that when the natural conditions were favourable, the desire for planting was sufficiently powerful to dispel this notion. One of the people interviewed by the aforementioned Commission preparing for emancipation stated: 'The freed black people are a real cancer on the colony. Those who hire them cannot rely on them. When they are most needed, for instance when it starts raining, which is the best moment for field labour, they throw away their hoe to go and cultivate their own land' (Staatscommissie 1856:229).

In 1911 this attitude was again the focus of attention. A district master stressed in a letter to the governor that this behaviour occurred mostly during the rainy period. In 1914 another district master complained that during a rainy year there was a lack of labourers on the plantations as they were working their own land.⁴⁴ There seems to have been continuous tension between working the plantation owner's or your own land first. This attitude was rationalized and affirmed in the following proverb: 'Plantadó di: promé awa ta awa' (The planter says: the first rain is the best rain). Also the expression 'Tera ta ranka' (The land is pulling) reveals a traditional view on land and is used to describe the urge for planting crops when natural circumstances are favourable.

In a year with sufficient rain people were sometimes able to harvest enough food for humans and animals for the next couple of years. However, drought was a recurring phenomenon, resulting in no harvest at all.⁴⁵ After a year of drought, people would often request the district masters to postpone their land rent, which was sometimes granted. The aforementioned government survey of 1906 on land rented from the State also gives an insight into the way tenants paid their rent. It reveals that in the second district the number of tenants not paying rent was high (about 17.5 per cent), followed by 13.4 per cent in the third district, 8.9 per cent in the fifth and lowest in the fourth district, where 2.6 per cent failed to pay. As noted before, the second district comprised the largest number of plots distributed by the government before and after emancipation. However, this was usually virgin land and required much more work before crops could be planted (*Koloniaal Verslag* 1907:23).

According to the agriculturist Fiedrich Went, people complained that the half hectare of land usually issued by the government yielded an insignificant harvest. Plots had to be at least eight hectares in order to yield a harvest that would provide a comfortable living. Due to this, and the fact that the second district was situated near town, in most cases the men would take additional jobs in town in order to supplement their income (Went 1902:48).

Renkema has revealed the correlation between drought and migration. He noted that the number of people emigrating in search of work would increase dramatically after a drought year. They would move to countries such as Venezuela, Colombia, Costa Rica, Santo Domingo and Suriname.⁴⁶

The shortage of water was also a matter of concern for the colonial government. At the beginning of the twentieth century several measures were introduced to address this problem. One such measure was the building of subsidized dams (Duyfjes 1914:226), which began in 1905. These dams formed reservoirs to retain water for the dry season. Some planters down river of the dams complained that in doing so the government had severely reduced the water flowing into their land.⁴⁷

Another course of action was the introduction of different varieties of millet, with a shorter growing time and requiring less labour and rain, such as the *maishi di shete siman* (seven-week millet) and the *maishi rabu* (millet with a tail), which was mostly planted in Aruba.⁴⁸ As part of governmental policy experimental fields of maize were planted, with some of these varieties receiving popular names such as *Kabes Largu* (Long head), *Santa Marta*, *Pichi Be* (Pietje Beker), *Carabagno*, *Maishi Rabu* and *Broomcorn* (KV 1910:28).

In a drought-prone island such as Curaçao, successfully harvesting the millet demonstrated that one had been able to transcend all natural challenges. The harvest was celebrated with much festive joy. It was a celebration of work, showing that all the hard work had paid off. This coincides with the proverb ‘Na mangasina di vruminga nunca no ta falta kuminda’ (In the warehouse where the ant stores its millet, there is no lack of food). It was also a community celebration. Harvesting work was reciprocal. Extended family members and neighbours would come and lend each other a hand (*duna un man*). There was a kind of reciprocal labour rotation which assured people that when the time came for harvesting their own land, there would be others willing to help, based on the idea of ‘Awe ta p’ami, mañan ta p’abo’ (Today is for me, tomorrow is for you).

Harvesting the millet took place in three phases. During the first phase, in the morning, the millet was cut. At sunrise men and women would gather in the *kunuku*. The men would cut the millet while the women would collect the crop and put it in a container or basket (*dakwe*). Music was a very important part of this process and the workers would sing songs to energize themselves. During this first phase the cow horn was blown rhythmically to call the labourers to work and set the pace of their collective efforts. This is similar to what Roger Abrahams describes as the ceremony of corn shucking in the United States (1992:84-5). On Curaçao the group cutting the millet synchronized their movements, thus creating regular sounds which were incorporated into the music. The impromptu lyrics varied from those with a religious content – thanking God for the harvest – to those with more secular themes, describing different aspects of life.

The second phase of the harvest celebration revolved around storing the millet. Now the workers would proceed to the storage place, the *mangasina*, to the rhythm of the drum, cow horn and the piece of plough called the *agan*. Apart from instruments and songs, this phase was also accompanied by performances. In one of the acts two men dressed as rivaling bulls – one representing an old bull, the other a younger one – would fight each other, ending with one being symbolically killed.⁴⁹ Sometimes there were also stick-fights. These performances, based on the agility of males in particular, also represented the vying for power and authority between the young and the old males. Here emphasis was placed on male dominance. Rogers notes that this tradition of topical play is evident throughout the United States and the Caribbean (1994:110).

In the third and final phase the work was finished and people gathered at the home of the organizers to dance and sing to the rhythm of the drum. Now the ceremony reached its climax. This was called *Seú será*. The music and the songs resembled those of the tambú. This heated component of the seú celebration met with much criticism by those with power. Because of its association with the tambú, priests would advise against this part of the harvest celebration.⁵⁰ Most probably due to these objections, in the beginning of the twentieth century an unsuccessful attempt was made to criminalize this celebration, when one of the district masters sent a letter to the priest in the eastern part of the island stating that those engaged in the celebration, as well as the owner of the land, should be prosecuted by law.⁵¹

As stated, a good millet harvest meant food for a few years. Very often rural people would relate that when food was scarce, it affected people in town earlier, as those in the kunuku could fall back on the stored millet. Thus millet came to symbolize abundance. However, in case of a long-standing drought even those in the countryside would suffer food shortages and start eating the seeds reserved for planting. Whenever there was a harvest surplus, this would be used along with other commodities as barter for material goods or services. This could for instance serve as payment for the services of a midwife or for the person who laid out the dead.

Agricultural work was combined with other forms of work. Often people would follow many different occupations in a lifetime. Written documents reveal that people would report a certain type of work in one year and another in the next. When comparing the land contracts in the fourth and fifth districts at the end of the nineteenth century with the death certificates of the same people, they appeared to have been registered differently with regard to their professions. The Colonial Report of 1903 also indicates that it is difficult to determine the professions of people. Someone would mention one day that he was a farmer, but the next day put forward another type of employment, depending on the work available at the time.

From the aforementioned survey of 1906 I have attempted to gain an insight into the number of people stating that they made their living as farmers (see Table 7.4). This reveals that the highest percentage of those dedicating themselves to agriculture was 79 per cent (in the eastern part of the island). The lowest is 57 per cent, in the district nearer to town. Apparently those living near Willemstad relied more on urban labour – whether this reflected their preference for urban over rural labour or rather the lack of rural opportunities is a question still difficult to answer.

Table 7.4 Cultivation of Government Land, 1906

	Second district	Third district	Fourth district	Fifth district	Total land
Total number of tenants	862	299	75	90	1326
Total land planted with millet	681	172	50	64	976
Total uncultivated land	181	137	25	26	371
Land uncultivated compared to total number of tenants	21.00%	45.82%	33.33%	31.11%	27.98%
The amount of land planted with millet compared to total number of tenants	79.00%	57.53%	78.67%	71.11%	73.60%

Source: Extract uit het Verslag onderzoek in pacht uitgegeven landgronden op Curaçao, Koloniale Verslagen 1906, bijlage O.

Fishing as an Alternative

An alternative to working the land in order to make an independent living was the fishing trade, also practiced by Afro-Curaçaoans during slavery. However, in his report of 1868, van Dissel concluded that fishing was regarded as being of little importance to the inhabitants of Curaçao. Men fished simply in small dug-out canoes in the harbour or in the bays, catching very little. He considered fishermen low on the social ladder. Due to their hard work, they were old and sick before their time. Unless they had family to support them, they often became a burden to the government (van Dissel 1868:433-4).

Early in the twentieth century Jan Boeke, assistant biologist at the Dutch national institute for maritime research, on the instigation of the colonial government made an overview of the fishing culture and a study of the possibilities of setting up a fishing industry in the West-Indies, also in Curaçao (1907-1919).⁵² Boeke's findings shed light on the fishing methods at the time and the names given locally to the fish, which he then compared to those in the region. He concluded that fishing was an underdeveloped economic sector. Boeke's study was continued by Dr. P.J. van Breemen in 1909, who also gave recommendations on developing a local fishing industry.⁵³

From these reports it is clear that a group of people – again their number would fluctuate annually – would earn money from fishing. This was, however, not easy due to the hardships faced as a result of their primitive dug-out canoes and techniques. Especially those fishing in the waterways belonging to plantation owners had a hard time complying with often arbitrary rules. Written documents and interviews show that among older fishermen there was a continuous power struggle with plantation owners for access to the sea

from their grounds. There were other problems as well. For example, the owners of the plantations of San Nicolas, Klein and Groot Sint Marta, asked the district master to be vigilant in the waterways as they accused the fishermen of stealing their salt ready to be shipped and of opening the estuary of their salt-pans without asking their permission, in order to place their nets.⁵⁴

Fishermen coming from the fishing communities of the island avoided these problems by remaining in the waterways near their villages. There were very few such villages, all having been established before emancipation and consisting mostly of freedpeople, who had adopted fishing as their major occupation. In the main these villages were situated in the western part of the island, the most important ones being Westpunt and Boca Sami.⁵⁵ The latter, inhabited by the offspring of a Dutch soldier and freedwomen, was for long characterized by its close-knit family relationships, its own form of Papiamentu and a sense of community excluding others not belonging to the in-group of the community.

The aforementioned researchers stated that fishing relied on traditional methods. Most of the equipment, such as the canoes and nets, were made by the men themselves. One method involved casting a net onto a school of fish from the shore or in shallow waters. In this case evening fishing was preferable, as then one could see a school of fish as it glittered in the water. The other method entailed standing on a rock with a fishing rod. This was mostly done on the northern side of the island, where there were plenty of fish in a relatively calm sea. These techniques were mostly an individual undertaking.

Another method was net fishing at sea, usually involving more than one person – sometimes several family members – with a more diversified labour division. People would fish from boats, with a captain and two or three crew on board. As the men would bring their fish to shore, they would sing *kantika di bua kanao* (songs to beach the boat); bystanders would also lend a hand, a phenomenon familiar in the Caribbean (Price 1966:1374). The captain was the owner of the boat and of the fishing nets and was therefore called the *doño di reda*. There was thus a hierarchy among these fishermen. The *doño di reda* would receive the largest share of the catch, while those without their own floating nets⁵⁶ would get a smaller share (van Dissel 1868:443-4). In conversation with elderly people, they stated that in this way a group of middle class families emerged through fishery. They were able to give their children a good education.⁵⁷

Fishermen were aware of the insecure basis of this way of living, as also indicated by the proverb ‘Tur dia ta dia di piska, pero no ta tur dia ta dia di kohe’ (It is everyday fishing day, but not catching day). Besides the uncertainties of whether or not one would be able to catch any fish, the seas were dangerous. Fishing boats could be dragged by currents out to sea and as most fishermen could not swim, falling overboard could be fatal. The many risks fishermen were faced with on the water were recounted in their stories, such as this one:

Un piskadó mester tin mashá tinu, tin tantu kos ku ta pasa riba laman. Un piskadó ta muri pa su bobo. E ta muri na laman pa su bobo. Ku e boto bira bok'abou..., ku e kos ei bira bok'abou òf yena ku awa, bo no por bai lag'é. Ku bo bai

A fisherman must be very alert, as much can happen at sea. A fisherman can die because of his stupidity. He can die at sea for his stupidity. If the boat turns over..., or fills up with water, you must not leave it. If you leave the boat, you

laga e boto ei, bo ta muri. Na e tantu mia [for di kosta] kaminda e boto a bira [bòltu], pa bo landa fo'i djaya bin kue tera, bo no por. Bo ta muri. Ta p'esei ora e boto bira bok'abou, bo ta tene n'e boto. Por pasa un bapor, ken ku pasa bo ta haña un yudansa, bo ta skapa. Bo mester tene n'e boto, pasó e boto ei t'e ta bo bida. Pasó laman n' ta pordoná. Laman n' ta pordoná.⁵⁸

are dead. Because from where the boat has turned over, you cannot swim to the shore. You will die. That is why when the boat turns over you have to hold onto the boat. Maybe another boat can pass by, whoever passes by can help you, and you will be saved. You have to hold onto the boat, because it is the boat which is your life. For the sea does not forgive. The sea does not forgive.

The insecurities surrounding the actual fishing also applied to the sale of the fish. This was mostly done by women. Women had the task of going around selling the fish in baskets while shouting *piska fresku* (fresh fish). Sometimes they would first fry the fish and then walk the long distance to town to sell them. This was an uncertain business, as people did not always have money to buy fish. Or sometimes they would buy on tick but never pay.⁵⁹ Fishermen often fell back on other professions in order to escape this insecurity. They would become sailors, work in town as dockmen or emigrate, depending on the labour opportunities available at the time (Boeke 1907:64).

Work Opportunities in Town

As previously mentioned, there was a growing tendency to not depend solely on a subsistence income but to participate in the wage economy, either on the plantations or in town, where labour opportunities were broader and one could earn more than in the countryside. The urge to go to town and search for employment ('Bai Punda pa buska un bida') was strong in both men and women. Following emancipation, this type of rural-urban migration became a common phenomenon. In April 1864 one of the district masters in the western part of the island reported that he had learnt by word of mouth from several planters in his district that the recently freed were leaving the plantations to settle outside their district or go to town.⁶⁰ As a result, planters did their utmost to prevent people from leaving. Those living under the *paga tera* system were hindered in looking for work elsewhere. But in the long term, the wages of thirty cents and a litre of maize per day were insufficient to pay for food, clothing and other necessities. If one wanted to go and work in town, a special permit from the plantation owner was required, as is shown in the following case:

Tempu mi tabata chikitu mi tabata serka mi tawela. Mi tionan ta traha den kunuku di Sabaneta. Nan ta bini Punda bin buska trabou. Promé ku nan sali Sabaneta, shon ta eksigí ku nan ta tuma un papel, anto ta hiba e papel serka shon Wilmu na Punda. Anto nan no por keda mas ku dos siman. Asina yega dos siman nan tin ku bai bèk. Nan tin ku tuma un papel serka shon Wilmu pa hib'é Sabaneta. Si nan yega Sabaneta i nan no tin e papel ei, nan no

When I was a little boy I was staying at my grandfather's. My uncles worked the land at Savaneta. They would go to town (to Punda) to look for work. Before they left Savaneta, the land owner required that they took with them a paper to give it to shon Wilmu in town. And they were not allowed to stay for more than two weeks. After these two weeks they had to go back. They had to get a paper from shon Wilmu and take that to Savaneta. If they arrived at

por drenta. Mi tabatin un tio ku yama Jan. E tempu ei mi tabatin seis aña. A sosodé ku el a bini Punda, bin traha na Punda. Dia ku e tabata bai bèk el a bai sin tuma papel. Tabata tempu di shon Jaco, no tabata tempu di Harry. Shon Jaco, e tata, a puntra mi tio pa papel. Tio di ku el a lubidá di tuma papel. Shon Jaco di ku e no por drenta. E di: Si mi no por drenta mi ta bolbe bai Punda. El a bin traha na Punda. Despues el a bai Venezuela. El a keda Venezuela ayá, hopi tempu.⁶¹

Savaneta without that paper, they were denied access. I had an uncle called John. At the time I was six years old. It so happened, that he went to town to work there. The day he was going back he forgot to take the paper with him. At that time we had shon Jaco, not Harry. Shon Jaco, the father, asked my uncle for the paper. Uncle said that he forgot to get the paper. Shon Jaco said that he was not allowed access. Then my uncle said: if I cannot get in, I will go back to town. He went to work in town, in Punda. Afterwards he went to Venezuela. He stayed there for a long time.

Some people from Banda Riba worked in town during the day and used their land solely as a place to live (*Koloniaal Verslag* 1907:23). Naturally, town provided different opportunities from the countryside. Men, for example, repaired boats, transported people in ferry-boats, loaded and unloaded ships (Irus 1910:57).

Both Otrobanda and Punda fostered the development of an artisan class with small businesses as blacksmiths, shoemakers, carpenters and tailors. In town young boys were able to learn a trade by becoming apprentices to craftsmen. Fine carpentry by skilled local carpenters was sought after at the time.⁶² The furniture was sold both on the local market and abroad. Locally they were made for members of the higher class, although the lower class would also acquire furniture – albeit of lesser quality – when getting married (Nije-Statius van Eps 1995).

In the late nineteenth century, as steamships began to replace sailing vessels, Curaçao became an important coal refuelling station for coal-powered ships. Due to the protected and safe harbour, commerce and seafaring became increasingly important. Men would carry baskets of coal on their shoulders; for each basket they were given a *locha* (token) which would later be exchanged for money. Every year around a thousand ships, carrying provisions from the Netherlands, would use the island's harbour. The following description comes from Didi Sluis, who in the beginning of the twentieth century worked in the harbour:

E trabou di Klep ta un trabou di bestia e ta'ta. Un trabou duru. Tin biaha, mi ta saka 200, tin biaha 250 makutu pa dia. Bo tin ku yena 100 makutu pa 1 florin. Subi trapí, yena krenwa, pusha krenwa, basha karbon. Bo pia ta kumin-sá slep. Bo n' por bai mas. E krenwa ta bira di banda, pero bo n' por basha karbon. Si bo basha, kla b'a keda. Bai kas bai kas. Ta kla bo ta. Ta yen di mucha ta sintá ta warda.

Harbour work is like animal work. Very hard work. Sometimes I would fill 200, 250 baskets a day. One had to fill 100 baskets to get 1 guilder. You had to climb the stairs, fill the wheelbarrow, push the wheelbarrow, and throw out the coal. You will feel like losing your footing. You will get tired. The wheelbarrow turns over, but you cannot lose any charcoal. If that happens, you are lost. They will tell you to go home. There are many boys, just sitting and waiting for a job.

This also shows that work in town was not always as favourable as people moving from the country had imagined. The Roman Catholic Church did not stimulate the migration to

town using the problems one was likely to encounter there as a deterrent.⁶⁴ People from the kunuku were also aware of the negative aspects of working in town. The lack of accommodation was a great problem, but also for example the presence of uncontrolled prostitution and the related venereal diseases, ironically called *malu di muhé* (sickness of women).

When comparing life in town to the kunuku an informant stated 'Parti di kunuku tabatin mas rêspet ku parti di Punda' (In the kunuku people had more respect than in town).⁶⁵ Respectful in this sense implies being subservient. The change of character some people would undergo in town was both admired and disdained. An informant from the kunuku remembered how her brother, who had been working and living in town, would bend a tambú gathering to his will and start singing improvised songs upon his return home at the end of each year. She recalled that the text of the particular song portrayed a self-image of someone defying any form of interference and oppression. This was also the image people in town and emigrants liked to portray of themselves, to emphasize a behaviour distinguishing them from those in the kunuku.

*Mi mama ta lisiinbein
anto mi tata skòrpion
anto mi mes ta araña di pinda
Nos ta pika mata unbe.*⁶⁶

*My mother is a centipede
and my father a scorpion
and I myself a stinging spider
We sting and kill immediately.*

Migration

Due to poverty young men in particular would emigrate to look for work.⁶⁷ Some praised this choice:

*Si bo sinta na kas, bo no ta gana nada, pasó'
Dios ta parti bendishon tur dia. Bo ta sintá den
kas, bo ta keha ku bo tin hamber, bo no tin tra-
bou... Dios ta parti bendishon. Bo mester ta
eifó pa bo haña bendishon, pa bo haña trabou.*⁶⁸

*If you stay home, you will not receive anything,
because God shares blessings every day. You are
sitting at home, complaining that you are hun-
gry, and you don't have any work... God shares
blessings outside. If you are outside, you will get
blessings, to get a job.*

Following emancipation, people from the Caribbean islands, including many from Curaçao, constituted the labour force for countries in the region in need of seasonal or temporary workers (Alofs and Dalhuisen 1997:157). Those recently freed, with neither access to land or prospects were often the focus of agents sent by companies from abroad to procure cheap labour.⁶⁹ The Latin-American rail network was one such destination for these workers. Afro-Caribbeans living in extreme poverty were eager to leave their country and create a better life for themselves. In 1872, for example, 399 Curaçaoans left to become labourers in the construction of the railway in Costa Rica (Römer 1977:48). Ten years later it was the construction of the Panama Canal that attracted poor black workers from Curaçao. In 1882, 46 men left to become part of the 130,000 strong labour force from the

English Caribbean working on the Panama Canal (Newton 1984:123-9). The following year 62 Curaçaoans left to work in Santo Domingo, mainly as cane cutters. In the beginning of the twentieth century some workers also left to Suriname and to St. Eustatius.⁷⁰

Work opportunities in Cuba stimulated a massive migration of male Curaçaoan labourers. This exodus has been studied by Paula (1973) and Allen (2001a). Never before had Curaçaoans emigrated in such large numbers, despite economic conditions in the host country not always being favourable. It is estimated that at the time around fifty per cent of the male labour population emigrated to work in the cane fields on Cuba (Römer 1977). There they were joined by a great number of people from the English Caribbean, Haïti, Puerto Rico and some from the Dutch Windward Islands. The transfer of labour from Curaçao to Cuba started in 1917. The exodus came to its peak in 1919, when at least 1,900 men left Curaçao to work for the *colonias* belonging to the Chaparra Sugar Company and the Manati Sugar Company.⁷¹

Studies on intra-Caribbean migrations from Curaçao have mainly focused on the underlying economic push and pull factors.⁷² Fraser sees the migration culture of the region as a kind of resistance: ‘people voted with their feet’. Those leaving their home countries clearly showed their dissatisfaction with the circumstances in which they lived (Palmer 1990:26). Economic factors indeed motivated the emigration of people from Curaçao. People left the island in search of work, while in some cases the migration proved financially successful with some black families being able to buy land with the money they had earned abroad. But the experience of migration went beyond the economic level. By emigrating, they also aspired to a higher social status.

These migrations were intended to be circular and not permanent. Sometimes, however, ‘temporary’ separations would last a lifetime, with the inherent consequences for mothers, wives and partners. The tension experienced during departure is expressed in the following song:

<i>Mi ta bai mi ta bai mi ta bai ku shon</i>	<i>I am going with the master</i>
<i>Ta ken lo mira mi mama bieu?</i>	<i>But who would look after my old mother?</i>
<i>Demarara ta un tera leu</i>	<i>Demerara is a far land</i>
<i>M'a puntra mi tata, mi tata n' sa di dje</i>	<i>I asked my father,</i>
<i>M'a puntra mi mama, mi mama n' sa di dje</i>	<i>I have asked my mother</i>
<i>Mi ta bai mi ta bai ku shon</i>	<i>But she does not know of it</i>
<i>Ta ken lo mira mi mama bieu?</i> ⁷³	<i>But who would look after my old mother?</i>

Those remaining behind often lived from hand to mouth in extreme poverty. The following song also deals with the abandonment of women. The informant related this song to the emigration of men to Cuba, but looking at the text it could have dealt with any type of emigration, at the time taking place to countries such as Panama, Venezuela and Santo Domingo. The following stanza expresses abandonment. The woman reflects on the departure of her lover, who had not even told her that he was leaving.

*Ai m'a subi un seru
 Ai m'a mira un barku
 Rosa a bin bisami
 ku mi dalia ta na bordo
 Hisa bela
 Hisa bela
 hisa bela bo bai.⁷⁴*

*I climbed a tree
 I saw a boat
 Rosa came and told me
 that my lover was on board
 Set the sail
 Set the sail
 set the sail and go*

The following narrative also displays this abandonment:

Mi tata a bai Cuba ora mi tabatin tres aña. Mi tata i mama tabata kasá na rat i na misa. Pero tòg el'a bai Cuba ku un otro muhé, ku kende e tabatin un yu ku tabata 11 luna mas yòn ku mi. Mi mama a keda atras e so. E no tabata manda sèn pa mi. Mi mama a traha pa kuida nos. Ta den tempu ku muhénan tabata traha sombré di kabana, ku nan tabata bende ku Arabir. Mi mama tabata traha sombré. Mi tabata biba ku mayornan di mi mama. Nan tabata yuda i kuida nos. Un parti di e plaka ku mi mama tabata gana ku trahamentu di sombré, e tabata hunga sam kuné. Un muhé den bario tabata hunga sam. Ku e sèn di sam ku e haña ora ta tok'é, e tabata kumpra paña i sapatu. Pa medio di e plaka di sam ei mes, mi mama a haña sèn pa lagami risibí. Dia mi tata a bini bèk for di Cuba na 1927, tabata 8 aña despues ku mi a risibí mi promé santa komunion.⁷⁵

My father left for Cuba when I was three. He and my mother were married both by Church and by law. Yet he left to Cuba with another woman with whom he had a child 11 months younger than I. My mother was left alone. He did not send us any money either. My mother worked to take care of us. It was during the time that women used to make straw hats which they sold to Arab merchants. My mother used to make hats. We lived with my mother's parents. They would also help to take care of us. With part of the money my mother earned through making hats she would play sam. A lady in my neighbourhood used to run the sam. With the money she would receive from the sam, when it was her turn, she would buy clothes and shoes. It was in this way that my mother received money for me to do my first communion. When my father came back from Cuba in 1927, eight years later, I had already done my first communion.

This story gives some evidence of how women survived by playing sam. It is a traditional saving system in which a few people would participate by putting some money into a communal pot when paid. Each member in rotation receives the total amount in the pot, as agreed upon at the beginning. This would be coordinated by a person named *kabes di sam*.

The Role of Women in Material Life

The lives of women were hard. In the kunuku and on the plantations they were involved in the fieldwork. Although women would often carry out the same tasks as men, they were paid half the wage of men. Apart from work on the land, there was the possibility of working for the government authorities. They would, for example, carry water to male labourers repairing the roads. Many women had to combine their work with caring for their chil-

dren and tending livestock. Mixed-farming was common practice, both on private land and under the *paga tera* system. Most households had a few chickens and sometimes some pigs. Goats in particular were considered a good investment; in the words of Fernando Henriques: 'the poor man's moneybox' (1953:24). The sale of a goat would help towards paying the land rent. Or one could sell a goat in case of a funeral or to cover marriage expenses.⁷⁶

Women were also involved in the daily domestic chores, such as looking after the children, cleaning and preparing food. The major task in preparing meals was processing the millet. Before cooking the millet, it took some time to separate the wheat from the chaff. Following this it was ground in the *metate* or pounded in the tree-trunk mortar. Whilst doing so, women would sing songs. By singing about their daily lives they could transcend the difficulties they experienced. An informant underlined this by stating that when she sang, she would forget her problems and life would seem bearable again. She sang the following song while pounding millet, the so-called *kantika di bati maishi*.⁷⁷

*Ai Dios, ta trabou di mata hende
esakinan.
Mi ta bai kunuku, eeh.
Mi sí n' ta bini Punda mas.*⁷⁸

*Oh Lord, it is work to kill people
this work.
I will go to the countryside, eeh.
I will never come to town again.*

In rural communities in particular, women were responsible for economic activities outside the village. They, for example, determined the price of the harvest surplus and sold it. Women would travel long distances on foot or on a donkey along roads in a bad state of repair⁷⁹ to sell the crop surplus and to purchase supplies, such as brown sugar (*suku di klenku*) and flour. The previously mentioned Ma Tuda from the most western part of the island, used to walk from Westpunt to town⁸⁰ to sell the produce from her land. She described the hardships involved:

*E pianan aki a kana kaminda di Punda. Ten mi
tabata mucha i despues ku mi a kasa, ta'a
meskos. Mi ta bai Punda ku karga riba mi
kabes. Un makutu yen di webu i kònkòmber.
Mi ta traha kunuku, kue kònkòmber, patia,
buta den makutu, buta riba kabes. Tin biaha
áwaseru ta batibo na kaminda, muha bo paña
papa papa. Ora awa pasa, bo tin ku ki'è, tros'è
i bolbe bisti mesun paña.*⁸¹

*These feet did walk to town, you know. When I
was a young girl I would do that and after I
married it was the same. I would go to town
with a load on my head. A basket full of eggs
and cucumbers. I would work on the land, reap
cucumber, watermelon, place them in a basket
and put that on my head. On your way to town
it would sometimes rain, then you got soaking
wet. When it stopped raining, you had to take
off your clothes, wring them out, and put them
on again.*

She related that after her husband died she also took on his workload; Ma Tuda continued to go to town to sell her products. After having been able to buy a donkey she reached town much faster so she could go there twice a week instead of once every two weeks.

Mi mes ta traha kunuku. Mi ta hòmbèr i mi ta muhé tambe. Mi ta traha, kue patia, kue komkomber, yena nan na makutu, pone nan riba buriku, bai Punda. Mi tabata bai Punda, dos biaha pa siman. Esei hende di ántes tabata hasi. Traha ku sodó di nan frenta pa nan biba.⁸²

I worked the land myself. I am a man and woman at the same time. I would work, reap squash, cucumber, fill my baskets, place them on the donkey and go to town. I would go twice a week to town. That is what people in the past used to do. To work from the sweat of their brow to earn a living.

It was a common phenomenon that neighbours would pool their money and appoint someone to do a bulk shop in town, a phenomenon known as *shèr*. The appointed woman would receive a list of items to be purchased. According to Rupert, mostly they were trusted and respected women in the community. They had to be good negotiators to successfully deal with the merchants in town (Rupert 1999:76; Clemencia 1996:82).

People farming in the eastern part of the island planted fruit and vegetables, such as okra, perpetual spinach, string beans, calabash gourds, Curaçaoan cucumbers and pumpkins to be sold in town. Some of these farmers had wells and windmills.⁸³ Rupert states that from the eighteenth until the beginning of the twentieth century Afro-Curaçaoan women often peddled their merchandise in the streets of Willemstad. They would sell sweets and other tasty food products, which they carried in a large basket on their heads while calling out what they were selling.⁸⁴

Many women were involved in other activities providing an income (*rende bida*).⁸⁵ Many studies mention the weaving of panama hats as an opportunity to earn a stable income.⁸⁶ The production of these straw hats depended on the prevailing fashion and therefore fluctuated over the years. After having fallen in the 1880s, the trade rose again by the end of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century it became an important export product popular in Europe, the United States, Barbados, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Guadeloupe and Venezuela. In schools set up by the Roman Catholic Church young girls were taught the skill of weaving hats.⁸⁷ The cooperative of agriculture also gave courses to women, who then instructed others in the countryside how to improve their hat-making skills.⁸⁸ The hat weaving trade introduced a new workpattern for women. They could stay at home and look after their children while weaving the hats. In the kunuku women were thus no longer obliged to work on the salt-pans⁸⁹ or to do other arduous work after the planting and harvesting of millet was finished. Girls would learn to weave hats at an early age and in that way helped with family finances. Especially in difficult times young girls would stay at home rather than attend school in order to help their mothers weave hats. Other, more enterprising women would pay a third person to do part of the work while they would finish the hat themselves.⁹⁰

There were three types of hats: the fine hats or *sombré fini*, the medium fine hat (*sombré medio fini*) and the rough hat, *sombré brutu*. The *sombré brutu* was worn while working on the land. An experienced hat maker would take two days to weave a hat; the less experienced up to seven days. Women complained about the amount of work required for weaving a hat and the physical strain involved: 'M'a traha sombré te mi dedenan a bira un banda' (I wove hats until my fingers became crooked). But they had the chance to increase their income by working faster and producing better quality hats.⁹¹

Most hats made on Curaçao were rough hats, locally called *sombré gròf*, *sombré parotin* or *sombré di Arabí*. The last name stemmed from Syrian and Lebanese peddlers arriving on the island at the end of the nineteenth century, known under the generic name of *Arabí*. They collected these hats for selling. Maura Pieternella, born in the second district on 30 November 1907, remembered how her mother used to negotiate (*negoshá*) with these Libanese peddlers over the price of her hats to ensure a good deal. Her father was a sailor and would spend little time at home. She also relates her involvement as a small girl in this economic activity.

R.A.: *Señora a bisa tambe ku señora a traha sombré komo mucha?*

M.P.: *Hopi. Tabata mi bida. Señora konosé Eliya Arabí? E tabata biba na Penstraat. E tin negoshi na Penstraat. Negoshi di kabana. Anto mi mama ta tuma un par di kabana serka dje i partié pa nos, pa mi ku mi ruman Ogenia. 12 kabes di kabana pa nos bai traha. Nos ta yuda otro. Den un siman nos ta kaba e sombrénan pa djaweps ora Eliya ta bini djaweps bini tuma su sombré. Den kareda di 10.00 or, nos ta kla.*

R.A.: *Kantu sèn señora ta haña?*

M.P.: *E sèn no ta mashá. Kada sombré ta 10 plaka (10 x 2 sèn i mei, ta 25 sèn) pa un. Kasi pòrnada bo ta traha.⁹²*

R.A.: *Madam, you told me that you wove hats when you were a little girl?*

M.P.: *Very much. That was my life. Do you know Eliya, the Arab man who used to live in Penstraat [near Willemstad]? He had a business in Penstraat. A business in straw. And my mother used to take some straw from him, for me and my sister Ogenia. 12 pieces of straw to weave hats. We would help each other. In a week, we would be finished with the hats, so that when the Arab Eliya came on Thursday to fetch his hats, about 10 o'clock in the morning, we would be finished.*

R.A.: *How much did you earn?*

M.P.: *The money was not much. For each hat we would get 25 cents. Next to nothing.*

Women would also wash and iron clothes for wealthy families. In 1900, 11 per cent of the female population was registered as washerwomen, while in 1910 this decreased to 7 per cent. This was an arduous task as the clothes were washed by hand. The process depended on the fabric. Sometimes the clothes were boiled to get the dirt out. White clothes were bleached and spread out in a field. At the time most clothes were starched. Afterwards they had to be ironed. Some women ironed exclusively. Ironing was very labour intensive, especially before 1934, when it involved the use of charcoal irons. Sometimes a woman had to burn the charcoal first, which required knowledge of the type of trees to use and the amount of time required for the charcoal burning process. The charcoal irons would be filled with hot coals to heat up the base. The holes in the back of these irons regulated the circulation of air to keep the embers burning. The irons were placed on a fire and had to be heated periodically when used.

An 83 year old informant who was interviewed in the late 1980s, recalled that as a young girl she would be sent out to iron clothes. She started work at eight o'clock in the morning and would finish at midnight. She focused on male clothes, as she could charge up to two guilders for a suit, far more than for a dress. She stated that 'Ta paña di hòmber ta'a yudami konopá i kinipi' (The ironing of men's clothes helped me make ends meet).⁹³

Women also worked as *yaya*'s for the coloured and white elite families in town. In this way some managed to escape poverty, like the nanny I interviewed who had left in 1913 to work for a Jewish family in Cuba. There she earned forty dollars per month – much more than the five guilders she could earn on the island as a nanny and far more than she could get for weaving hats. She had to leave her only child behind, but sent her money and goods. Interviews with some of these former nannies reveal that their work would sometimes involve several families.⁹⁴ This was something in which they took great pride, such as is apparent in the following account:

C.K.: *Despues ku mi mama a muri, m'a bai Punda. Mi tabata yaya di yu. M'a mira nietu di Shon Leyba. M'a mira Doctor Capriles su nietunan. Mi a keda kada un di e lugánan ei 6 aña. Mi ta keda na trabou, mi no sa bini kunuku. De bes en kuando mi ta bini kunuku pa mira mi tata.*

E.J.: *Kuantu ta'a gana?*

C.K.: *Tres heldu pa luna. Ma por a biba. Bo ta haña tur kos di kumpra.*

E.J.: *Tabata haña kuminda?*

C.K.: *Sí, ku kuminda.*⁹⁵

C.K.: *After my mother died, I went to work in Punda. I was a nanny. I was a nanny for the grandchildren of shon Leyba. I also looked after the grandchildren of Doctor Capriles. I stayed six years at each of those places. Sometimes I would go to the countryside to visit my father.*

E.J.: *How much did you earn?*

C.K.: *Three guilders per month but you could live. You could buy everything.*

E.J.: *Did you get food?*

C.K.: *Yes, with food.*

Römer (1976) considers these nannies a link between western and African culture and as such they represent keyfigures in the creolization process in Curaçaoan society. Nannies played an important role as transmitters of Afro-Curaçaoan cultural elements. They were very close to the children in their care as they would look after them all day and at night sleep beside their beds on the floor. In this role, they were able to pass on cultural elements and values which differed from the 'white' environment in which the children lived. They told them Nanzi stories because these could transcend class and ethnic barriers, and as such these oral traditions achieved the status of collective property for the ruling class and the subjugated alike.

Some women talked about their experiences as a *yaya* with much pride. An informant stated that she had enjoyed being a *yaya*, as this involved her in all matters regarding the children ('Ora bo ta *yaya* bo ta den tur kos'; when you are a *yaya* you are in everything). She attended all parties with the family and was dressed according to the latest fashion. Due to their close relation to the employer, nannies tended to look down on the other servants. *Yaya*'s returning from abroad with their employers assumed an air of importance. Witteveen's most recent study on *yaya*'s (2006), however, shows that their situation was not as rosy as it may have seemed. In particular those who had given up the work, as they had been unable to abide by the rules, would openly reveal the negative aspects. They had little time to themselves and had to be at the family's beck and call, day and night. Others claimed in retrospect that they had had to sacrifice their private lives, having remained unmarried and childless in order to keep the job.

Another type of work was carried out by the *menchi*: a woman employed to breastfeed a child, mostly of elite families. The following account comes from a lady whose mother was a *menchi* for a plantation owner.

Tempu mi mama a hañami, esei ta mi mama a kontami, un di e shonnan a haña un yu hòmber, nan a yam'é Frank. No ku mi konos'é, bo sa, e shonnan no ta buska hende manera mi pa konosé komo ruman di lechi. Mi mama tabata duna e Frank ei, kri'é ku mi lechi. Anto mama no por kome nada pa e yu ei no haña mal di barika. E shon a eksigí di mi mama, un pechu ta pa mi, un pechu ta pa e shon. Tempu di katibu, no. Tempu di katibu, no. Ami ta yam'é asina pasó awor akí ta kua hende ta bai tuma e kos ei? Tur eseinan... Ora nan a eksigí mi mama asina, mi mama di nò, anto e yu tin ku muri. Ku e no por bebe kaminda mi yu ta bebe, mi no ta dun'é. Anto nan a ens, pasó e shon no ta duna niun yu lechi. Anto e ora ei mama a sigui dun'é lechi.⁹⁶

When my mother gave birth to me, she told me that one of the plantation owners had given birth to a son. His name was Frank. I don't know him, you know, the owners do not need someone like me to be recognized as their milk-sibling. My mother used to breastfeed him with my milk. And mother was not allowed to eat anything so that the child would not get stomach problems. The owner demanded that one breast be mine, and the other one his son's. Slavery time, slavery time. I call it so, because nowadays nobody would accept that. All that... When the owner demanded that of my mother, she said no, then your child will have to die. If he cannot drink at the same breast as my child does, I am not giving him any milk. Then they agreed, because the shon does not breastfeed any of her children. Then my mother continued to give him milk.

Some women, both in town and in the countryside, had the opportunity to open small shops and thus become entrepreneurs. They would sell products such as flour, sugar, biscuits and coffee, which had become popular. Sometimes women in town would act as intermediaries for farmers wishing to sell their produce, as was the case with fifty year old Carolina, who agreed to sell milk in town for the land owner Cohen Henriquez – she was paid ten per cent of the sale price.⁹⁷ In town, for example, women would chop meat for people in shops or would carry people's faeces in buckets to dispose of in the sea.

The notion of autonomy that this afforded was related in an interview with a woman born in 1900 who had owned a small shop in Otrobanda. Here she explains her desire to work for herself:

Mi n' bai traha pa niun hende pasombra mi n' ta wanta niun hende hasi abusu di mi. Mi ta traha riba mi mes. Mi mama a siñami traha tur kos. Traha bolo, tur kos el a siñami. Despues el a siñami kose. M'a siña kose. Mi a kumpra un mashin di kose.⁹⁸

I have not gone to work for anybody because I cannot bear people taking advantage of me. I work on my own. My mother taught me to do everything. To bake, everything she taught me. Afterwards she taught me to sew. I learned to sew. I bought a sewing machine.

It was not easy to accurately establish the number of female shop owners at the beginning of the twentieth century. I attempted to deduce this from an article in the newspaper

La Cruz in 1918 listing shop owners in the kunuku who besides common goods sold cigarettes.

Table 7.5 Overview of Shopkeepers in the Kunuku

	Name	Place	Geographical position on the island
1	Bechi Laurends	Westpunt	Banda Bou
2	Bernardo Matheu	Kas Abou	Banda Bou
3	Djerri Helmeyer	Willibrordu	Banda Bou
4	Julus Helmeyer	Mahuma	Middle of the island
5	Evelina Willem	Kamina Nobo	Middle of the island
6	Anita de Lanoy	Seru Fortuna	Middle of the island
7	Maria Jansen	Bou di Barber	Banda Bou
8	Shon Walle	Sta Rosa	Banda Riba
9	Catalina Merkis	Montana	Banda Riba
10	Pablo Ruiz	Sta Maria	Middle of the island

Source: *La Cruz*, December 1918

The names indicate that about fifty per cent of these shops were owned by women. However, this gives only a rough indication as it concerns shops where one could buy cigarettes, a new product on the market. It is probable that these were the more enterprising shopkeepers.

Some of these women were also known to sell alcohol, sometimes without a permit and thus illegally (Rutten 1989:47). In 1863, for example, Elba Naar was accused of selling alcohol to some policemen on plantation Barber. She was, however, able to avoid prosecution by telling the authorities that she had only offered the men some drinks free of charge as they were nice people who did their job diligently.⁹⁹ Women were also primarily responsible for organizing dances with an admittance fee, an illegal activity. In 1901 all seven people who were fined for organizing a dance party in a public place without permission, were women (Koloniale Verslagen 1903).

In addition, women had the opportunity to become teaching assistants for the nuns who taught the children at school. These teaching assistants were young, lower class women, who had been instructed by the Roman Catholic Church. They received some education in reading and writing and had to live a respectable life. Any rumours or gossip about them could lead to their dismissal.

Finally, through midwifery women could earn a stable income. In 1874 a large group of traditional midwives from all over the island were given a legal permit to offer midwifery services.¹⁰⁰ Most of these women had acquired their knowledge and skills from family members, often during slavery. They were respected by the community they served. In 1995 I was able to interview a ninety year old woman from a long line of midwives on the

island. Her great-grandmother, who had also been a midwife, was the daughter of a midwife called Bachilie Antonia Ignacio in Buitenbosch (the eastern part of the island). In a letter dated 3 May 1868 the district master petitioned the government to give Bachilie some financial support because of the help she had offered both during and after childbirth to many slaves and freedwomen of the poorer class.¹⁰¹

Conclusion

In this Chapter I looked at how Afro-Curaçaoans managed to survive economically. The recurring economic difficulties of the island with its ecological challenges made life for most Afro-Curaçaoans a real struggle and this group remained economically very vulnerable. The constant search for a livelihood is captured by the Papiamentu term 'buska bida', through which Afro-Curaçaoans defined their situation. The term implies a creative action, which also typifies the economic life of this group. On the practical level buska bida manifested itself in resistance to and confrontation against land owners, district masters and sometimes even Roman Catholic priests, as well as in negotiation with these authorities.

This search for a livelihood involved a constant search for land, for food and for wage labour by both men and women. Those who remained on plantations complained about the control exercised by the owners. It was not the unpaid work for the plantation owners they resented, but rather that they had to, when natural circumstances were favourable (principally during the rainy season), pay attention to the land of the owner before they could tend their own. The intrusion in their private life, with domination extending over their children, generated much more antagonism than the Church's involvement in their lives. A reason for this may be that, as we have seen, the Church also worked in helping out people in need.

Attaining a piece of land helped people to become in a sense autonomous. Land had an enormous significance for Afro-Curaçaoans, in the extreme form manifested in the symbolic attitude of reverence towards what was called 'tera di famia' (family land). Some people were able to practice agriculture or fishing and could in that way participate in an autonomous subsistence economy, usually on the basis of their traditional knowledge and skills. Sometimes, in periods of drought, they had to turn to local plantation owners for work in order to survive. There was a continuous urge for self-reliance expressed in the tendency to leave the countryside and move to town. Sometimes this was part of an internal migration flow, which later turned into an external one, with many men leaving the island in search of work.

Both those in town and in the countryside undertook all types of activities and services in demand at the time, some of which do not appear in the statistics. Next to more regular jobs such as dockworker, nanny, washerwoman, ironer and seamstress, people would, for example, use their knowledge of medicinal herbs to cure people, lay out the deceased, perform as singers or musicians, or carry the faeces of people to the sea. In that way men as well as women were active in supporting the household, be it by working for a salary, by bartering or by carrying out reciprocal land labour services.

In dealing with these economical challenges, Afro-Curaçaoans created the hybrid conditions of their own ways of life. Here economics were not the only aspect that mattered. Some freedpeople, who did not hold any social position in regular society, were able to assume positions of leadership within their communities and were greatly respected because of the creativity and perseverance they invested in organizing their lives after slavery.

Notes

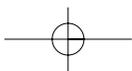
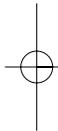
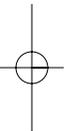
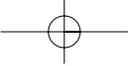
- 1 The word 'kunuku' refers to a plot of land where crops are planted and to rural areas outside town.
- 2 *La Cruz*, 24-6-1914.
- 3 Interview Altagracia Regina (granddaughter of Ma Yaya Felipa, born 2-5-1910), Brenneker, 20-1-1983 (T 87, Fundashon Biblioteka Públiko Kòrsou).
- 4 Interview Louis Lourens (born 1879, Willemstad), Brenneker, 1959 (Zikinzá-collection, T 524, NatAr).
- 5 Broek 1990. Between 1920 and 1935 the Afro-Curaçaoan authors Willem Eligio Kroon, Manuel Antonio Fraai and Simon Miguel Suriel wrote short stories in *La Union*, aimed at morally instructing Afro-Curaçaoans.
- 6 Johannes Martes Kasiano from Plantation Blauw, for example, who was stabbed on Christmas Eve 1870, was also known as Johannes di Blauw (NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Rol van Strafzaken 1878, Procesverbaal no. 24).
- 7 After the birth of a child a deep hole was dug in the mother's yard, in which the umbilical cord and afterbirth were buried. Interview Nana Demalia (born 1873, Seru di Mahuma), Brenneker/Juliana, 1959, (Zikinzá-collection, T 474, NatAr).
- 8 Land as an object of wealth is also present in one of the four earliest published Nanzi stories, in 1899. In the story *Kompa Nanzi i e pòpchi di breu* (Nanzi and the tar doll), Nanzi goes out to steal fruit for his hungry family on the estate of the king, which has all types of tropical fruits in abundance. *Cuenta di Nansi* 1899:104-6.
- 9 NA, Ministerie van Koloniën, 1850-1900, inv. no. 6739,23-8-1864/554.
- 10 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 2e district, inv. no. 132, 12-10-1874/40 and 4-12-1874/49. However, this case also reveals that the governor did not see the words of the district master as final: he asked him in another letter to elaborate on the objections against Apostel, to which the district master complied.
- 11 Similar reactions were given to petitions of other people (NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 2e district, inv. no. 133, 20-6-1876/48, 18-10-1876/86).
- 12 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, inv. no. 126, 6-8-1864/83 and 20-8-1864/86; inv. no. 35, Beschikking Gouvernement van Curaçao en onderhorigheden, 23-8-1864/554. The district master made this decision in an attempt to stop people from dispersing.
- 13 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 3e district, inv. no. 139, 14-4-1864/49.
- 14 NA, Ministerie van Koloniën, 1850-1900, inv. no. 6783, 29-5-1885/281. See letter finance administrator to governor, 14-5-1892/212, 150 (NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Administratie van Financiën, 1892, inv. no. 37).
- 15 Minutes meeting of Society of Agriculturists, 24-11-1909 (*Koloniaal Verslag* 1910).
- 16 NA, Ministerie van Koloniën, 1850-1900, inv. no. 6783, 29-5-1885/281. See also letter finance administrator to governor, 14-5-1892, no. 212/50 in which he explicitly states this problem (NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Administratie van Financiën, 1892, inv. no. 37).

- 17 NA, Ministerie van Koloniën, Gouvernementsjournaal van Curaçao, 1890-1891, inv. no. 6788, 27-2-1890/128.
- 18 Interview Brenneker/Juliana, probably 1958 or 1959, as most of the interviews were done in those years. (Zikinzá-collection, T 34, NatAr). Unfortunately no age or name of the male informant was registered. Nevertheless I have chosen to include this due to its vivid description of plantation life.
- 19 NA, Ministerie van Koloniën, Gouvernementsjournaal van Curaçao, 1890-1891, inv. no. 6788, 27-2-1890/128. The finance administrator stated in this letter to the governor that before emancipation freed blacks had had the unwritten right to settle on the 'Savaan Westpunt' to build homes and practice agriculture. This right was hereditary but according to the administrator the situation was getting out of hand (NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Administratie van Financiën, 1892, inv. no. 37, 14-5-1892/212).
- 20 Interview Geertruda Alberto, also called Ma Tuda (born 1883), Allen, 30-8-1983 (NatAr).
- 21 The plantation owner referred to him as 'certain Martili from Savaan Bulumonte'.
- 22 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Districtbeheer. Ingekomen stukken 2e en 3e district, inv. no. 102, 9-12-1909.
- 23 Renkema 1981a:157; NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 4e district, inv. no. 151, 27-2-1890/128.
- 24 Interview Geertruda Alberto (Ma Tuda) (born 1883), Allen, 3-8-1983 (NatAr).
- 25 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 2e district, inv. no 131, 26-4-1864/28.
- 26 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, inv. no. 125, 23-5-1863/5. See also NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Administratie van Financiën, 1892, inv. no. 37, 16-12-1895/162.
- 27 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken, 3e district, 1863-1906, inv. no. 139, 26-4-1864/56. According to the commissioner of the third district also in his district people were cultivating land without legal proof or permit.
- 28 NA, Ministerie van Koloniën, 1850-1900, inv. no. 6734, 31-12-1862/906.
- 29 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, inv. no. 127, 3 -10-1867/143. See also Koloniale Verslagen 1910 [KITLV]:. under the heading 'animal husbandry' this phenomenon was also described.
- 30 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 2e district, inv. no. 131, 16-5-1863/3.
- 31 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, inv. no. 125, 23-5-1863/5.
- 32 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 3 district, no. 140, 5-3-1866/9.
- 33 See letter district master to deputy Procuror General (NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, 1863-1904, inv. no 126, 26-4-1866/45).
- 34 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, inv. no. 126, 22-12-1865/137; inv. no. 127, 27-4-1866/46 and 25-3-1867/48.
- 35 Interview Eduardo Tokaai (born 1899), Allen, 12-9-1984 (NatAr).
- 36 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 2e en 3e district, inv. no. 168 20-2-1912/44.
- 37 The *mondi* is an area of wild growth, with a small variety of trees, such as watapana, brasil wood and *kibra hacha* trees. The *mondi* is also important for food gathering. One may find here fruit of the cactus *milon di seru* (Melocactus), the *infrou* (Opuntia werntiana), the *datu* (Lemairece-reus griseus), the *kadushi* (Cereus repandus), the *karawara* (Cordia alba R. et Sch.) and the *mari-pompun* (Omphalophthalmum rubum karst). As well as a provider of food, the forest is also recognized as a place where particular supernatural beings are said to dwell, also known as *spiritu*.
- 38 Interview Simon Bonifacio (born 1908) and Clemence Bonifacio (born 1907), Allen/F. Muizenberg, 9-5-1989 (NatAr).
- 39 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 2e en 3e district, inv. no. 168 20-2-1912/44. See also interview Maria Antersijn-Martina (born 1910), Allen, 29-5-1992 (NatAr).
- 40 Interview Maria Antersijn-Martina (born 1910), Allen, 29-5-1992 (NatAr).

- 41 Went 1902 (Appendix V, KV 1902, p. 46); Rijkens 1907; Kakebeeke 1912.
- 42 See *La Cruz*, 28-1-1903 (a comment on the report written by Went).
- 43 Ustilago is a kind of fungi which causes harm to the millet.
- 44 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 2e en 3e district, inv. no. 169, 18-5-1914, no. 140.
- 45 Spanjers (1981:6-7) states that between 1830 and 1982 – except 11 years, when no measurement of rain was taken – the average rainfall was 575 mm. In the period 1830-1914 the average rainfall was 574.1 mm. The period of this study, 1863-1917, saw 28 years with a rainfall below average.
- 46 Renkema 1981a:361-3; van Soest 1977:20; Koot 1979:44, 54; Dekker 1982:98; Pietersz 1985.
- 47 *Koloniaal Verslag* 1912 . The importance of these dams in society is manifested in the saying ‘Traha dam, warda awa’ (Building a dam to save water), meaning it is necessary to save when the possibility arises.
- 48 Benjamins, 1914-1917:457; *Koloniaal Verslag* 1908. This type could already be harvested in January, the other one not until March or April. However, people complained that the *maishi rabu* could easily be destroyed by worms.
- 49 Pencheon (2000) states that the bull play of St. Kitts is a folk drama representing a true incident which occurred around 1917 at the Belmont sugar plantation. No information has been received on whether the bull play in Curaçao was based on a true incident. However, in some oral narratives bulls were mentioned as terrors of the plantations and some informants recalled how people were killed by enraged bulls. Also cows were used to deter naughty children. Pencheon also states that in West-African culture the cowhead figure represents strength, power and authority.
- 50 *La Union*, 3-4-1890.
- 51 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Minuten van uitgaande stukken 2e district, inv. no. 190, 23-3-1927.
- 52 Boeke was sent to the Caribbean for nine months by the minister of Colonies (Weber 1921:215).
- 53 Van Breemen 1909a en b.
- 54 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, inv. no. 126, 1-9-1867/90.
- 55 Van Breemen 1909b.
- 56 A ‘reda’ is a fishing net with cork floats and weighted at the bottom with lead or stone.
- 57 Interview Emil Paulo (born 1890), Allen, 23-8-1983 (NatAr). Paulo was an important *doño di reda* in Westpunt.
- 58 Interview Carlitu Martina (born 1905), Brenneker/Juliana, 25-4-1984 (T 101, Fundashon Biblioteka Públika Kòrsou).
- 59 Interview Emil Paulo (born 1890), Allen, 23-8-1983 (NatAr).
- 60 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, inv. no. 125, 13-4-1864/21.
- 61 Interview Brenneker/Juliana, probably 1958 or 1959, as most of the interviews were done in those years. (Zikinzá-collection, T 34, NatAr). Unfortunately no age or name of the male informant was registered. Nevertheless I have chosen to include this due to its vivid description of plantation life.
- 62 Rijkens 1907; Römer 1977:43. The *Curaçoise Courant* of 24-3-1888 published an announcement of the owner of a furniture factory in Puerto Rico looking for skilled fine carpenters to come and work in Puerto Rico. This announcement re-appeared six times in the newspaper. It shows a willingness to employ these workers abroad but the number of times the ad appeared seems to indicate that at the time carpenters were reluctant to leave.
- 63 Interview Didi Sluis (born 1904), Allen, 15-5-1984 (NatAr).
- 64 In 1905 the Church dedicated a series of eight stories to a man who went to town to work: *La Cruz*, 18-1-1905, 25-1-1905, 1-2-1905, 8-2-1905, 15-2-1905, 22-2-1905, 29-3-1905 and 5-4-1905. The man was unsatisfied with his life in the kunuku and wanted to go and live in town. The fact that so many stories were told relating to this subject showed that the Church was against this urban migration. Town was seen as a place where trouble prevailed.

- 65 Interview B. Kirindongo (born 1924), Allen, 2-2-2000 (NatAr).
- 66 Interview Lucita Emanuel (born 1909), Allen, 16-5-1989 (NatAr).
- 67 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 2e en 3e district, inv. no. 169, 18-5-1914/140.
- 68 Interview Lorenzo Fernando (born 1902), Brenneker/Juliana, 31-10-1985 (T 114, Fundashon Biblioteka Públiko Kòrsou).
- 69 Soon after emancipation people started leaving the country. On 9-7-1863 a labour agreement was made between 25 freedpeople and a Venezuelan employer to work in Venezuela. On 10-7-1863 and 16-7-1863 agreements were made with 25 Curaçaoan men to sail the river in Venezuela with lighters in order to transport products (NatAr, Notariële protocollen, 9-7-1863, Not. Akte, Inv. 53, no.151; Notariële protocollen, 10-7-1863, Not. Akte, Inv. 53, no.155; Notariële protocollen, 17-7-1863, Not. Akte Inv. 53, 159).
- 70 Van Soest 1977:20; Koot 1979:44, 54; Dekker 1982:98; Pietersz 1985.
- 71 After Cuba was struck by the sugar crisis in 1921 a large number of Curaçaoans returned. The Curaçaoan-Cuban migration of cane workers consisted essentially of working-class males. Most women remained at home. Some were driven into extreme poverty, surviving on a meagre income derived from weaving straw hats (Allen 1992).
- 72 Van Soest 1977:20; Koot 1979:44, 54; Dekker 1982:98; Pieters 1985.
- 73 Interview Cai Maduro (date of birth not registered), Brenneker/Juliana, 1959 (Zikinzá-collection, T 704, NatAr).
- 74 Oral History Project in preparation of the documentary 'Bosnan skondi' (Hidden Voices) by Jeanne Henriquez and Rose Mary Allen, July 1992, Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology of the Netherlands Antilles and Centre for the Development of Women (SEDA). See also interview Mathilda Francisca (date of birth not registered, Santa Martha Grandi, Banda Bou), Brenneker/Juliana (undated interview; Zikinzá-collection, T 231, NatAr).
- 75 Interview Imelda Valerianus (born 1915), Allen, 6-6-1992 (NatAr).
- 76 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 2e district, inv. no. 138, 7-4-1903/54 and Brievenboeken 2e en 3e district inv. no. 168, 20-2-1912/44.
- 77 Songs were named after the activities performed. The songs for pounding millet were sung while rhythmically pounding the millet in the tree-trunk mortar. There were also songs for grinding millet in the *metate* called *kantika di mula maishi*. And there were songs to accompany the pounding of cactus (*kadushi*) with the mortar called *tati*: *kantika di tati* (songs to pound cactus).
- 78 Interview Isabel Valks (born 1906), Allen, 13-3-1984 (NatAr).
- 79 The *Amigoe* (5-5-1886) published an overview of the poor condition of the roads, particularly in the western part of the island. The road from Savaneta to Westpunt was very bad, as was the one from Lagun via Knip to Westpunt. On Santa Martha all roads to the north were impassable. The road from Porto Mari to Ascencion was full of holes. The one from Salina to Klein Fontein and over the hill of Sebastiaan could not be passed by cart, and a pedestrian found no space to give way to a cart.
- 80 According to van Kol (1901) this walk took around fourteen hours.
- 81 Interview Geertruda Alberto (Ma Tuda), (born 1883), Allen, 30-8-1983 (NatAr).
- 82 Interview Geertruda Alberto (Ma Tuda), (born 1883), Allen, 30-8-1983 (NatAr).
- 83 In 1919 the cooperative of agriculture subsidized the digging of wells. Previously this expense was in the hands of the farmer (NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 2e en 3e district inv. no. 168, 20-2-1912/44). Kakebeeke (1912:5) states that two of the hired plots of land in the western part of the island had a windmill, against 48 plots with windmills in the eastern part. On these plots people would plant vegetables to sell in town.
- 84 Rupert recalls a certain Ma Labertina who lived at the end of the nineteenth century/beginning twentieth century and who was also mentioned in de Pool (1935:271; Rupert 1999:60-1).
- 85 Through these activities they could make an income for the day (*saka dia*). They would also make ends meet by engaging in one activity to compensate another (*dal vla saka vla*).

- 86 Catalogus 1913; Rustige 1934; van der Veen 1984; Rupert 1999; Henriquez 2002.
- 87 Before using the raw material a woman had to clean it, strip it (take off the hard exterior) and cut the straw into strips. The type of material used depended on the type of hat. Because the straw had to remain wet as it was woven the woman continuously dampened it with a cloth soaked in lemon water. One would start with the middle part of the hat called the *rushi*. According to the particular model, there were different kinds of *rushi*. They had local names such as *rushi kokolishi*, *rushi Henriquez*, *knoopsgat* and *Pietermai*. Afterwards one would elaborate around the *rushi* in the form of a series of circles. Every time a new straw was added, this was called *kresida*. When this was finished, one made the crown (*bòl*) and the brim. The last part, called the *bor*, was done in several ways, depending on the type of hat. The amount of time it took to make a hat varied and depended on the model. After the hat was finished, it was washed with soap and allowed to bleach in the sun for a few hours. For extra whitening it was placed in a bath of sulphur during the night after which it would be placed in the sun to dry. The finer hat was given a finishing touch by ironing it or hitting it with a special hammer.
- 88 Rustige 1934; van der Veen 1984; Rupert 1999; Henriquez 2002. In 1920 the cooperative of female hat makers 'Arbeid Adelt' (Work gives honour) was founded (until 1924).
- 89 They worked the land, they loaded the salt. Their role in this was so important that it was mentioned in Catalogus 1913:59.
- 90 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Rol van Strafzaken, Criminele en Correctionele Teregtzitting 1872, Procesverbaal no. 31.
- 91 Locally these hats were given names relating to the fineness of the weave. The finer hats were also known as *Rouville*, *Nuyens* and *Gentleman*, the first two having been governors of the island. Such a hat could cost between five and twelve and a half guilders. The medium fine hats were locally known by the names *Ola*, *Kastol* and *Kompa*.
- 92 Interview Maura Pieternella (born 30-11-1907), Allen, 16-4-1996 (NatAr).
- 93 Interview Frida Streedels (83 years of age in the late 1980s), 1980 (NatAr). This (undated) interview was conducted by Sonia Garmers.
- 94 Interview Eleonora Hermes (born 1883), Allen, 14-5-1986 (NatAr).
- 95 Interview Clementina Kirindongo (born 25-10-1878), Brenneker/Juliana, 27-9-1977 (T 54, Fundashon Biblioteka Públiko di Kòrsou).
- 96 Interview Ini Sirvanie (born 1-4-1910), Allen, 27-11-1989 (NatAr).
- 97 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Rol van Strafzaken, Criminele en Correctionele Teregtzitting 5-5-1874, Procesverbaal no. 24.
- 98 Interview Maria (who refused to reveal her family name, born 1900), Allen, 22-9-1988 (NatAr).
- 99 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, inv. no. 125, 18-9-1863/53.
- 100 NA, Ministerie van Kolonien, 1850-1900, inv. no. 6747, 9-4-1874/161 (14 women were appointed), 21-4-1874/181 (21 women were appointed). In 1874 the government legalized midwifery. The names of these midwives were given by the district masters, who knew them. The letters of recommendation were sent to the members of the Medical Council.
- 101 Els Langenfeld, 2001a. See also NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 4e district, inv.61. 3-5-1868. In my conversation with this woman she informed me that many midwives had extensive knowledge of childbirth. Birthing customs were passed on from generation to generation. Midwives were knowledgeable about the use of different types of herbs during and after pregnancy. For example, during nine days following the birth, the mother should drink a concoction made of leaves from the *welensali*, *basora pretu* and *karawara blanku*-tree for the recovery of the womb and to prevent infections. She also had to take a herbal bath (*soba* or *tuma sodó*). For this, a tub was filled with the hot liquid of these leaves. The woman assumed a squatting position above the tub, allowing the hot steam to enter the womb and cleanse it. Interview Aniceta (Yeta) Albertus (born 17-5-1902 in Willibrordus), Allen, 2-9-1984 (NatAr).



CHAPTER VIII

Biba un Bida Drechi: Living a Respectable Life

The previous Chapter addressed the daily economic life of Afro-Curaçaoans in order to draw attention to their resilience in the face of the hardships they encountered. Through necessity, Afro-Curaçaoan women in particular participated actively in a wide range of economic activities, thus putting their shoulders to the wheel to help provide for their families.

Caribbean family structures and relationships have received much attention from scholars (Clarke 1957; Barrow 1996). For Curaçao, one pioneering study has been that of Abraham-van der Mark (1973), focusing on relationships between the sexes and the different types of union formed in the twentieth century. The author shows an interest in the pattern of development of non-legal unions among Afro-Curaçaoans and the matrifocal family structure, suggesting a general male marginality. She looks at matrifocality as the type of household in which a woman lives alone with her children – and sometimes grandchildren – without the presence of a male, or with a male who does not provide for his family (Abraham-van der Mark 1973:38). In 1965 and 1966 A.F. Marks (1973) also researched family life on Curaçao, focusing on Afro-Curaçaoan matrifocal families in the twentieth century.

To date few studies have looked at how families developed during slavery and after emancipation. It was commonly thought that slaves lacked stable family values and therefore a durable family life. However, a study by Han Jordaan (1999:474) shows that a variety of family constructs were upheld. Apart from the female-headed household there were individuals sharing the same roof with couples and/or nuclear family units, consisting of father, mother and children. Studies in Jamaica on family organizations show that the nuclear form of family was also present among many Jamaican slaves in the early part of the nineteenth century, deriving from monogamous practices which were, however, different from those in the metropole. In the Caribbean there was a pattern of sequential monogamy, implying that slaves usually spent their adult life in several successive relationships (Beckles and Shepherd 1991:209-21).

Following emancipation, the State and particularly the Roman Catholic Church, increased efforts to influence relationships between the sexes and family life of Afro-Curaçaoans. The term 'bida drechi' was introduced by Catholic authorities, introducing set values regarding proper family relationships. It was the opposite of the *biba den piká* (living in sin). One had, for example, to regulate one's sexual life through marriage. A man and a woman cohabiting thus had to marry in the eyes of the law and of the Church so

that they could form a respectable nuclear family. 'Bida drechi' was also applicable to single people still living with their parents: it gave an ideal image of the relationship between a man and a woman.

The findings by Jordaan dismissed the idea put forward in many studies on family life, namely that the enslaved did not know and appreciate the nuclear family pattern as a family form. Most studies focused on the contrast between the idealized but uncommon nuclear family relationship between a man and a woman and the dominant female-headed household (Abraham-van der Mark 1973; Marks 1973).

The aforementioned author Abraham-van der Mark concluded that Afro-Curaçaoans had internalized and idealized the value of a nuclear family pattern and that they considered those not living accordingly a common failure (1973). The scholars Linda Terpstra and Anke van Dijk (1987) reject this position and claim that many Afro-Curaçaoan women preferred the position as the pivotal member of the family. In that way they were not dependent on a man who might fail to take care of his family due to social circumstances or sometimes out of choice.

Abraham-van der Mark records two terms which she states were used to describe the male-female relationship on Curaçao: 1) *kompaná*, where a man and a woman cohabit, and 2) *bibá*, where a couple lives separately and the man visits the woman from time to time. Although in interviews elderly people would refer to 'bibá' or 'kompaná' as the same form of cohabitation, the term 'bibá' is a direct description of the couple's living arrangement and therefore not considered a word suitable to use in public. It was therefore masked by the more indirect term 'kompaná', thus a way of masking that a couple was living without being married. It was also used to mask the relationship between a man and a woman where the man would visit his partner occasionally, maybe because he was already married. Using the term 'kompaná' instead of 'bibá' underscores the idea that it was not considered a respectable way of life. Indirectly it sustains Abraham-van der Mark's perception of marriage as the idealized form of male-female relationships.

People would manifest their preference for marital relationships in other ways as well. According to Brenneker, in the neighbourhood called Seru Fortuna, there were cases where people were chased away when they were found cohabiting (1961:35). An incident in 1890 led to a court case: a man called Koeiman was taken to court after he had gone to the home of Maria Rosalie on the afternoon of Sunday 8 June 1890 and being angry, had broken down the roof of her house after having shouted that he did not want her to continue living in an unlawful relationship with a certain Leon on his land.¹

The Papiamentu proverb 'Mihó un bon bibá ku un mal kasá' (It is better to live in a good concubine than in a bad marriage) clearly throws a different light on the value attributed to marriage and cohabiting than the concept of *bida drechi*.² The following *banderita* also gives further insight into these matters:

Dalia bo ta bai
Dalia bo a hasi bon di bai
Karpinté a traha dos porta
*pa sali un malu dreña bon.*³

Dalia (my love) you are going
You did well to go
The carpenter made two doors
so when the bad leaves, the good enters.

The Church and the Afro-Curaçaoan people clearly had different views regarding the structure of marital relationships. These behavioral paradoxes show the complexity of male-female relations and bring us to the question: what did family life really represent for Afro-Curaçaoans after emancipation? How did they interpret what was meant by *bida drechi* and how did this manifest itself in their daily family lives?

Gender Roles

The organization of the family was expected to revolve around the concept of 'bida drechi', a respectable life. This seems to imply that *bida drechi* and the values it upheld concur with what Peter Wilson (1973) called respectability. Wilson sees respectability as the moral force behind the coercive power of colonialism and neo-colonialism, which is dominated by the value system of the Church. Respectability is exemplified by the island's small middle class and by women of all social classes, for whom the Church is the principal social domain. Men being less devout than women were in the main excluded from this social platform (1973:102).

Living a *bida drechi*, however, implied much more than marrying and attending Church. The Roman Catholic clergy recognized that considerable effort was required to attain a *bida drechi* and tried in many ways to influence this, including through the introduction of guidelines outlining how men, and especially women, should behave as individuals and as a married couple. For women the Church preached a cult of domesticity, respectability and pureness, which it attempted to instill from an early age. In this way it worked towards institutionalizing the subordinate position of women, thus realizing patriarchal dominance within the family. Men's perceptions of the correct behaviour of women would determine the way in which they behaved towards them. The assignment of land by the government reaffirmed women's subordinate position. In 1885 and 1889 regulations were imposed stating that unmarried women were not entitled to purchase land.⁴ An overview of requests by unmarried women reveals that they were denied land for building homes based on the argument that they lived with their parents and were therefore not in need of their own home. For example, two women, Plantin and Selina, both unmarried and without children, were denied the two acres of land each had requested. The reason given for this was that the land was too large for single women. These plots were reserved for men with large families.⁵

This indicates that the State also cultivated the idea that decent women should remain under the control of their parents until they married. Nevertheless, married women were also denied land as such requests could only be carried out by their husbands. Some women refused to accept this and repeatedly applied for land.⁶ Yet their position was increasingly undermined due to the State institutionalizing the male as head of the family and the Church preaching this middle class value as necessary for building a new Curaçaoan society.

The following story expresses a cultural assumption of how women should behave in a relationship with a man. In this story the relationship is treated metaphorically with animal figures as protagonists. It is to be noted that it was remembered by a female informant.

Warawara tin masha rabia riba galiña, pasó galiña a nèk e. E tabata kasá ku galiña. Awó galiña tabata hasi su trabounan mashá bon, ma despues a drent' é un mal ehèmpel. A bin bira ku e no ta hasi trabou di kas mas. Tur dia tin balia na kas di Koma kalakuna. E ta bai balia. Or' e bini su kurpa ta kansá, e no por hasi trabou. E ora ei warawara ta haña duele, pasó e ta bisa warawara ku e tin doló di kabes, e n' por a hasi trabou. Warawara pober ta bini, e mes ta kushiná. Awor kompa chuchubi ta su amigu. Kompa chuchubi a mira e kos ei, e di: 'Awèl mi tin ku bisa kompa warawara e kos ei.' Awor un dia, nèt ora kompa warawara ta den kunuku ta chapí, kompa chuchubi a para riba un palu anto el a kanta: 'Kompa warawara, bo di bo señoira tin doló di kabes, pero bai kas di koma kalakuna bai mira kiko e ta hasi ayá.' Warawara a skucha anto e di: 'Nò, ta kiko esei?' El a keda studia un ratu. Despues el a benta su chapí abou, el a disidí di bai kas. Ora el a yega kas e no a haña koma galiña den kas. Buska buska tur kaminda, el a disidí di bai kas di koma kalakuna. Ora el a yega ayá, ai el a bin haña koma galiña no, mort' i fuma den brasa di un kalakuna-gai ta balia, ta benta garganta atras, bon bistí, tur na sinta. El a para wak nan bon, el a bini kas. Asina koma galiña a drenta, el a duna koma galiña un bon halá di sota... Koma galiña a keda tur kèns bentá abou. El a haña asina un rabia, ku el a kom' é. Wèl for di e dia ei, warawara no por a mira galiña mas. Unda ku e mira un galiña e ta kom' é, asina tantu rabia el a haña riba galiña. I asina tambe e kuenta a kaba.⁷

Warawara (crested caracara) hates chickens, because he was cheated by one of them. He was married to a hen. At first the hen used to do her work very well, but suddenly she became lazy and stopped doing her house chores. Every day there was a dancing party at the home of Mrs. Turkey. She used to go dancing there. When she returns home, she is so tired that she cannot do any chores. Warawara pitied her, as she used to tell him that she had a headache, and she had not been able to do any work. Poor warawara, he himself had to cook. Now chuchubi is the friend of warawara and he saw what was happening. He said: 'I have to tell mr. warawara about this.' Now one day when warawara was hoeing his land, chuchubi went on top of a tree and said: 'Kompa⁸ warawara, you say that your wife has a headache, but go and look at the home of Mrs. Turkey and you will see what is happening.' Warawara listened and said: 'No, what are you talking about?' He contemplated for a while. Afterwards he threw down his hoe and decided to go home. When he arrived home, he did not find his wife, Mrs. Hen there. He looked everywhere. He then decided to go to Mrs. Turkey's house. When he arrived there, he found Mrs. Hen as drunk as a fiddler, dancing in the arms of a young turkey. She was nicely dressed with all types of ribbons and kept throwing her head backwards. He stood there and watched, then he went home and waited. As soon as Mrs. Hen entered he gave her a good beating. Mrs. Hen remained on the floor out of her senses. He hated her so intensely, that he ate her. Well, as from that day, he could not see a chicken anymore. Wherever he saw a chicken he had to eat it. That much he had hated Mrs. Hen. And that is the end of this story.

A woman was judged within society by the ways she was able to satisfy the basic needs of her husband. In the following narrative the woman again failed to accomplish this, and even though her motive was of a religious nature, it was condemned.

Un dia un hòmber a bini kas, e no a haña su kuminda. E muhé ta gusta su rosario i su misa. Ma e hòmber sí no ta gusta su misa. E ke haña su kuminda kome. El a yega kas un dia, e no a haña su kuminda, el a bati e muhé. E muhé a

One day a man came home and did not find his food ready. His wife liked to pray the rosary and attend Church. But the man did not like to go to Church. He wanted to have his food ready when he came home. Once he came home and did not

*kore bai mondi. Un mondi grandi masha sera.*⁹ *find his food ready, he beat his wife. His wife ran inside the wood, a very dense wood.*

Both stories demonstrate what kind of behaviour was expected of a female. They also address the punishment for female misbehaviour: the men resort to domestic violence. Following emancipation, women were likely to be subjected to violence by their husband or by the man they were cohabiting with. Court records show that ill-treatment of female partners or wives was deemed unacceptable.¹⁰ In these cases men would usually state their motives for this ill-treatment, thus indirectly giving an insight into what expectations they had of women. There is, for example, the court case of Simon, who kicked to death the three year old daughter of Maria Louisa, with whom he cohabited on plantation Asiento. Simon continually ill-treated Maria Louisa and on that particular day had become very angry because his dinner was not prepared when he arrived home from town.¹¹

Sometimes women could not accept this victimization and sought help through the courts. For example, Zoila, a 19 year old straw hat maker cohabiting with a man named Ilario, took him to court after he had badly beaten her when she complained about his late return from a dance.¹² Most of these court cases dealt with women living in town. Virtually no records were found relating to domestic violence in the kunuku. There, the matter was likely to be settled within the community, by someone with authority. The priest Brenneker was informed by a lady born in 1868 that her father had told her about a place on the plantation of San Juan which had come to be known as *Ninga Mari* (Refused partner) based on the fact that a man called Buchi Wan used to ill-treat his 'woman' at that place. Members of the community chased him away, denying him further access.¹³

It was very important for a woman to uphold an image of respectability. Court records show that some women would use the courts when they felt they were dishonoured verbally. These cases were mostly the result of quarrels, where a woman would be slandered about her alleged sexual behaviour. A woman named Helena, for example, requested the district master to forbid a man visiting her home as he was spreading the rumour that he had had intercourse with her. Despite this prohibition he did visit her, entering her home and sitting in her chair. When she tried to get him to leave, he called her a whore and claimed that he had had sex with her and also wanted to beat her. The next day he repeated this from the hill top in the neighbourhood and the next Sunday again in front of the church.¹⁴ Inevitably, these public slanders would taint the respectability of a woman.

Another case was that of Isabelita who took Rudolph to court, a man spreading a slanderous rumour claiming that he had had the opportunity to have sex with her, but had declined this to have sex with her sister instead.¹⁵ In 1907 a woman named Mathilda took another woman, named Claricienne, to court, as she had slandered her by calling her a whore and accusing her of 'pretending to be a fine lady, when in fact she was cohabiting with a man by the name of Winkel'.¹⁶ By mentioning the man's name the slanderer claimed to have some knowledge of the behaviour of the woman. In this case the name would indicate that he was a member of the higher class.

It was not only women taking men to court. A certain Wim took Carmelita to court after she had told him not to bother with her affairs but to concern himself with his wife's instead, who she claimed was committing adultery with a certain Juan, son of Djina.¹⁷

Again the name of the person is mentioned. In a case where a woman was accused of theft, she was also labelled a whore.¹⁸ These cases reveal people's perceptions of respectability. For a woman this revolved around her sexuality: retaining her virginity or remaining faithful.

Songs were also important as a medium for questioning respectability. For example, songs dealing with extramarital relations placed much emphasis on the respectability of the woman. The wife and the lover of a man are each other's *kombles* (rival). This is manifest in the following song, where the wife labels her rival 'kombles'¹⁹, thus categorizing her as a promiscuous woman and comparing her with a woman of the street (a whore). The singer stresses the lack of her rights as opposed to a married woman.

*Ajera m'a mira mi kombles
E ta bin ta tira puña pa mi
e ta bini largami sabi
ta kom mi ta sintimi awor
ku dalia a bai largami
ningun contesta mi no a dune
mi kacho ke responde
mi di kune larga e sol ladra kaya
pasobra e ku kaya ta igual
Mi kacho ta mihor kune
pasombra e tin derechi, e tin banchi.²⁰*

*Yesterday, I saw my kombles
She came and threw words at me
asking me how I feel now
that my man has left me
I gave her no answer
my dog wanted to answer
I told it to leave the street
barking only to my kombles
because she and the street are one of a kind
my dog is better off than she is
because it has rights, it has a penning.*

The following song relates to a woman's extramarital relations. It concerns a woman called Chikita who lived together with a man named Djodjo, but rumour suggested she had a child with the overseer. Once again, the woman is portrayed as someone behaving immorally.

*N'yèyèyè, n'yèyè,
Ta yu di bomba ku Djodjo.
Parandero Yè.
Chikita, ata yu ta yora
Parandero Yè
Ta yu di bomba ku Djodjo
Ta yu di bomba ku Djodjo.
Parandero Yè.²¹*

*N'yèyèyè, n'yèyè,
It is the child of the overseer and Djodjo
Revellers Yè.
Chikita, the child is crying
Revellers Yè
It is the child of the overseer and Djodjo
It is the child of the overseer and Djodjo
Revellers Yè.*

As an alternative to court action, *tambú* songs were composed by women themselves in an attempt to salvage their respectability. For example, in the following *tambú* song, the woman-singer recalls with regret that the affair ended with the man sending her back to her mother when she became pregnant. In these songs relating to sexual conduct, metaphors were used. The male informant who sung it to me believed it to be a true story which he had heard during a *tambú* celebration on the plantation in Banda Bou where he lived at the beginning of the twentieth century.²² By singing it in public and communally, the woman gave her own side of the story, in doing so curtailing the gossip and the rumours stemming from this event.²³ It could also be a way of warning other women about

the dangers of illicit sexual relationships, including ruining any marriage prospects, thus indirectly sustaining the Catholic clergy's concept of *bida drechi*. This coincides with the proverb 'Un hòmber ta kai den lodo, lanta sagudí su kurpa, e ta keda hòmber' (A man would fall in the mud, would stand up, shake his body and will still remain a respectable man).²⁴ Although women had no such luxury, they would express themselves in order to draw attention to their particular situation.

Three variants have been found of this song, thus revealing a recurrence of this type of relationship, in which women experienced a form of exploitation by men.

<i>Tur hende a papia un ko'</i>	<i>Everybody said something</i>
<i>Ta kon mi so n' papia nada?</i>	<i>Why did I not say anything?</i>
<i>Pasó m'a hasi un negoshi</i>	<i>I did a business</i>
<i>m'a e negoshi n' kumbiními</i>	<i>but the business was inconvenient</i>
<i>M'a hasi negoshi</i>	<i>I did a business</i>
<i>Ma negoshi a sali malu</i>	<i>But the business went bad</i>
<i>M'a kumpra un barí di suku pretu</i>	<i>I bought a barrel of brown sugar</i>
<i>M'a vende, m'a perdè ariba</i>	<i>I sold it at a loss</i>
<i>Shonnan, el a pidimi rosa mondi</i>	<i>People, he asked me to clear the land for sowing</i>
<i>El a pidimi kima sushi</i>	<i>He asked me to burn the trash</i>
<i>Awó ku bòshi ta na ranka</i>	<i>Now that there is a fruit on the vine</i>
<i>el a mandami pa mi mama.</i> ²⁵	<i>He sent me to my mother.</i>

The following variant of the same song collected by Brenneker and Juliana expresses anger about the situation and in this case is more direct in accusing the male. Again the singer improvises her anger to the inspiration of the moment, using the well-trying motif of the *tambú*.

<i>Zimulai, Zimulai,</i>	<i>Forgiveness, forgiveness²⁷</i>
<i>Zimulai na de dòntru</i>	<i>Forgiveness to hell</i>
<i>Ku mi sambarku di shete sribu</i>	<i>With my seven strapped sandals</i>
<i>m'a yudabo, traha kunuku</i>	<i>I helped you to farm</i>
<i>Awó ku pampuna ta na ranka</i>	<i>Now that there is a pumpkin on the vine</i>
<i>b'a mandami pa mi mama</i>	<i>you have sent me to my mother</i>
<i>Zimulai, Zimulai,</i>	<i>Forgiveness, forgiveness</i>
<i>Zimulai na de dòntru.</i> ²⁶	<i>Forgiveness to hell.</i>

The third variant using a rhythm was carried back by labourers returning from Cuba and also focuses on this theme:

<i>M'a yudabo rosa mondi</i>	<i>I helped you clear the land for sowing,</i>
<i>kibra sumpiña den mi dede</i>	<i>had cactus thorns pierce my fingers</i>
<i>p'awe ku pampuna ta na ranka</i>	<i>and now there's a pumpkin on the vine</i>
<i>bo mandami pa mi mama...</i>	<i>you sent me to my mother...</i>
<i>Tu kabritu keje keje,</i>	<i>Keje keje goat that you are,</i>

*kon binibo na baranka?
Tu kabritu keje keje,
kon binibo na baranka?²⁸*

*how come you took to the rocks?
keje keje goat that you are,
how come you took to the rocks?*

As previously stated, according to Wilson, respectability is exemplified by the middle class on the island and also by women of all social classes, who are notably more devout than men (1973:102). For the male culture he used the concept of ‘reputation’, a clear distinction from the way women were judged. According to Wilson men mostly hang out on the street, its adjunct. They would gather at the rum shop at every opportunity to drink, play games and above all talk (1973:149-50). This notion is applicable to Curaçaoan male society as well. The Church often complained that it was only marginally successful in imbuing a moral code in Afro-Curaçaoan males and that their manners were less attuned to the Roman Catholic values. Popularly such a man was called *muchu hòmber parandero*: a ‘reveller’, unwilling to settle down.

The following *tambú* song – which I collected from a male informant – seems to comply with this. The main character reassures his mother that she should not be afraid to lose him as a consequence of marriage. He likens himself with a cockroach who knows how to fool a hen. Here an element of play and trickery is also present. The song portrays the relationship between a mother and her son. The same woman who has been protective of her daughter, allows her son a lot more freedom. She expects her daughter to marry, but her son, who would support the family financially, she would rather hold on to.

*Hendenan tur yega serka
Mi ta bai kontabu mi pasashi
ma kaweta ta na porta
i ta bai bisa ku t’ami di
Ai mama, mir’è ta yora
ku e ta bai pèrdè su yu baron
Mama, bo no yora
t’ami ta e kakalaka
ku ta dual galiña bula bai.²⁹*

*People come and draw close
I am going to tell you my story
But gossip is at the door
And will say that I have said
Oh mother, look at her crying
Because she is going to lose her son
Mama, don’t you cry
I am the cockroach
to fool the hens and fly away.*

This song coincides with the following extract from a narrative recorded by Juliana, in which a man named Carlitu Martina, born in 1905, discusses fishing at sea off the northern coast of the island. He compared the sea there, with its almost constant heavy waves, to a man who on seeing a woman becomes very agitated. In this sense the sea represents manhood and therefore strength and power.

C.M.: *Laman di nòrt no por mira muhé ku wowo.*

E.J.: *Ta bèrdat e kos ei?*

C.M.: *Sí. E no por mira muhé ku wowo, ta laman machu esei.*

E.J.: *E no por mira muhé.³⁰*

C.M.: *The sea at the northern part of the island cannot stand the sight of women.*

E.J.: *Is that true?*

C.M.: *Yes. It cannot stand the sight of women. It is a male sea.*

E.J.: *It cannot stand the sight of women.*

People had a conception of what represented a good man: someone who provided for his woman and children. He had to be a *hòmber trahadó*, a hard-working man. Elsie Solassa, for example, refers to the expectations of his mother's family with regard to any prospective husband: 'E mester ta hende serio, i e mester ta trahadó tambe, paso ora bo kasa bo tin ku traha' (The man had to be a serious person and a hard-working man, because when you get married you have to work).³¹ Another example is the following saying, which reinforces the expectation that good men earn money: 'Loke un bon hòmber ta trese na kas ku man, tin muhé ta tira afó ku kuchara' (A spendthrift woman will squander what a good man has earned).³² One of the questions the girl's family would ask a man wanting to propose was whether he had been able to build his own hut, since this was also an indication of whether he could provide for a woman. Following are some of the additional questions asked when someone proposed, told by Rosa Isabela, born in 1900.

*Buchi Jobe a bai puntra pa kasa ku Katrina. Buchi Jobe a kana yega na kas di mama di Katrina. E ta bisa: 'Kon bai Ma?' E mama ta respondé: 'Kon bai Buchi Jobe. Buchi Jobe, no ta drenta?' 'Sí, Ma.' 'Kiko ta Buchi Jobe su respondi.' 'Ma, mi a bin puntra Ma pa Katrina.' 'Buchi Jobe tur kos ta kla?' 'Sí Ma, mi tin un mangasina yen di maishi chikí. Anto mi tin seis galiña rondó di kas. Anto Ma, mi tin buriku machu mará na palu. Anto mi tin kalbas, ku ta karga dies dos kana di mangusá, pa hende di trabou tempu di kunuku.' 'Buchi Jobe, Bo tin karson pa bai afó.' 'Sí. Mi tin dos karson pa bai afó. Un di nan Katrina mester lapi.'*³³

Buchi Jobe came to propose marriage to Katrina. He walked and reached the home of the mother of Katrina. He said: 'How are you, Ma?' The mother answered: 'How are you, Buchi Jobe? Do you want to come inside the house?' 'Yes, Ma.' 'What did you come for, Buchi Jobe?' 'I came to ask Ma's permission to marry Katrina.' 'Buchi Jobe, do you have everything ready in place?' 'Yes, Ma. My storehouse is full of millet. And I have six hens walking in my yard. I also have a male donkey tied to a tree. And I have some calabashes which can carry twelve litres of mangusa (food made of millet, beans and peanuts), for when the people come to help to harvest.' 'Buchi Jobe, do you have pants to wear for travelling?' 'Yes, I have two pairs of pants to wear for travelling. One pair needs to be mended by Katrina.'

Also a man with whom one was cohabiting, was judged against these expectations. For example, when Johannes was stabbed to death by a 35 year old former slave called Chevalier on Christmas Eve 1877, Petronia, with whom the deceased had a visiting relationship, lamented the fact now the man who took good care of her and her children, was dead.³⁴

Poverty and its Impact on the Bida Drechi

Poverty was an ever present constraint on family life. After emancipation, the socio-economic situation for a large group of Afro-Curaçaoans was very bad, with many living in extreme poverty. Crops often failed for several consecutive years, resulting in people having next to nothing to eat (Renkema 1981a). Each year the colonial report would record rainfall patterns. It also reported whether there were other types of livelihood available and would give an overview of these.

In many court cases hunger was given as a motive for stealing food or breaking the rules with respect to the amount of produce transported and the required permit. These court cases would increase in a drought year – a bad year, *mal aña* – resulting in no harvest at all. Children would then stay home from school, or receive biscuits at school. Family members would even fight over food.³⁵ The newspaper *La Union* of 13 April 1889 wrote that poverty had increased and that there was a lack of work; even begging had become difficult. Begging was a common feature in the life of Afro-Curaçaoans, as expressed in the proverb ‘Kaminda buriku trapa, totolika ta bebe awa (Where the donkey steps, the bird totolika will drink water, in other words: poor people must receive from the rich). On 11 February 1903 *La Cruz* described how poor people would go and collect the bread that the warships had thrown into the sea and would let these pieces dry so that they could eat them. In the same year the district master wrote that he saw people, formerly in a good position, starving, with nothing but herbal tea to drink.³⁶

Popularly these years were called ‘aña di tene muraya’ (the year(s) to hold the wall(s), due to people becoming so weak that they needed to lean on the walls while walking). Poverty meant being unable to pay the land rent (resulting in requests for dispensation from the government) and a lack of food, water and proper clothing, which especially affected children.³⁷ Hunger was referred to euphemistically as ‘awe krus ta abou’ (today the cross is down) or ‘Wancitu a subi mesa’ (Juancito has climbed on the table). Nevertheless, starvation was a common reason cited for stealing. For example, Hose, a former slave who in 1879 was 66 years old, received five years imprisonment for stealing a sheep. His argument was that he had become too weak to work and that the money he earned was not sufficient to live on.³⁸ An extreme example of poverty was the case of a twenty year old female straw hat maker who in 1874 tried to kill her child by pushing a stone down its throat. The mother cited destitution as the main provocation for her action.³⁹

People would sometimes resign themselves to poverty with certain expressions, such as: ‘Nos t’ei na mundu pa biba kontentu pasó hende mester biba kontentu, sea barika yen, barika bashí, kontentu ta spar bo’ (We are in this world to live happily. Because people have to live happily, whether you are sated with food, or have an empty stomach. Happiness will save your life).⁴⁰ The agony of hunger was expressed in all forms of oral tradition. Many stories and songs concerning poverty focus in particular on its effect on family life. For example, food was a recurring theme in many Nanzi stories. The trickster Nanzi would steal food from shon Arei, who had an abundant supply. The rationale for his action was that his wife Shi Maria and their children were starving. In the stories, however, Nanzi did not always share the food with his family and sometimes behaved irresponsibly. This was not approved of.

In most stories and songs concerning hunger, children were the focus, being the most vulnerable. The aforementioned Boeke described how the bellies of young children would be swollen due to hunger while their bodies remained very thin (1907:52). Dekker’s study (1982) revealed a high incidence of child mortality before the age of one.

The following song related to me in 1984 by an 84 year old interviewee who had learnt it from his father, focuses on the plight of a starving family, a father and mother with four children. There is no work. One of the children sings in a child-like way and states that he is hungry. He tells his father and mother that he has pain in his belly. They have nothing

to feed him and the child gets angry and throws his plate on the floor. The plate falls and makes the sound *vayo plinin*. One of the greatest challenges of family life was to feed one's children.

Ami tin djolo, bayayo
Ami tin djo vayo plinin
Pega kandela djolo
Vayo plinin
*Zea nun de, vayo plinin.*⁴²

*I have pain, bayayo*⁴¹
I have pain, vayo plinin
Put on the fire, pain
Vayo plinin
*Zea nun de, vayo plinin*⁴³

The same motive is present in the following story. Again it presents a recurring challenge: how can the family survive in the face of these economic difficulties? Here it is apparent that poverty also impedes children's education. The story revolves around whether the child can attend school while being hungry.

*Un dia tabatin un mama i su kasá. Un yu so nan tabatin. Nan tabatin un bida mashá penoso ku otro. E tata ta bai mondi bai piki palu seku, mara, bin kòrta bin bende na porta di kas pa kuida kas. Nan ta sinta riba un piedra o riba un barí, asina pover nan tabata. E mucha a keda te na ora e mester a bai skol. Awor e tata ta deseá pa e bai skol, ma e no tin moda pa e mucha bai skol. E mama di: 'Laga nos buska un manera pa e bai skol.' E tata di: 'Ta ki nos por hasi... Anto no tin nada... Tin mainta n' tin ni kòfi ni te.' E mama di: 'Laga e mucha bai skol den nòmber di Dios.'*⁴⁴

Once upon a time there was a mother and her husband. They had only one child. Their life together was very pitiful. The father would go to the bushes to pick dry pieces of wood, tie them together, then cut them and sell them in order to maintain his family. They were so poor, that they had to sit on a stone or on a drum. Now it was time for the child to go to school. The father wanted him to go to school, but there was no money to send him. The mother said: 'Let us find a way for him to go to school.' The father said: 'What can we do... And there is nothing... Sometimes in the morning there is neither coffee nor tea.' The mother said: 'Let the child go to school in the name of God.'

The following statement given to Brenneker by a woman who had experienced this type of hardship clarifies what it meant to live in poverty. It shows how creative a mother had to be in order to feed her family. What is important in this statement is the informant's idea about marriage and her contribution to keeping the marriage together despite economic difficulties.

Den mi bida di matrimonio..., mi a tene mi matrimonio. Mi a sòru pa mi lugá, manera tempu tabata. Mi kasá tabata gana tres (énfasis) yotin ku un riá òf ku dòriá pa siman. Kada un aña i dos luna mi tabatin yu. Te mi a haña 17 yu. Mi a lucha ku matrimonio te ora m'a fustan kon tin di hasi ora bo ta den e bida ei. Kasá ta gana tres yotin ku dòriá pa siman. Ora

In my marriage..., I kept my marriage alive. I took care of my home, according to how the situation was. My husband used to earn 1.65 guilders or 1.80 a week. Every one year and two months I gave birth to a child. I got 17 children. I struggled with my marriage and learned how to manage while in such a life. My husband earned 1.80 a week. At the end of the week, he

siman yega, e mester tuma un riá pa tabako. Anto ta keda ku tres yotin ku un riá. Pastor, e sèn no ta yega pa kria kas yu, yu chikí den kas. Pastor, mi ta mara mi kabes, mi ta kue mi kaminda. Despues ku mi a bira brutu den e bida, mi ta faha mi lomba, kue mondi. Buta yunan den kas, duna nan kos, buta nan sinta riba stul, sera kas. Mi ta kue te mondi di Papaya, na sùit di seru di Papaya. Ora mi yega den mondi, mi ta kue shimaruku, yena maku-tu, yena otro tas na mi man. Mi ta yega kas, traha papa pa mi yunan. Anto mi ta bai bisti mi paña i mi ta kue kaminda di bai Punda. Na Punda mi ta bende shimaruku. Shimaruku akí, shimaruku ayá, pa mi haña sèn pa kumpra kuminda hiba kas. Mi so riba kaminda pa bai kas. Banda di 8'or di anochi mi ta na e lugá ku yama Jandoret, banda di Samí. Ei mi ta para mira mi kas si tin lus. Lugá no tin lus. Yega haña mi yunan tur di krimp krimp banda di otro, huntu ku kasá, paso kasá no tin pa duna. Pastor sa ken a lucha ku bida di matrimonio? Ta p'esei mi ta tur mankaron. di matrimonio? Ta p'esei mi ta tur mankaron.⁴⁵

would take 15 cents for tobacco. And there would remain 1.65 guilder. Pastor, you know, the money was not sufficient to keep a home, take care of the children, small children. Pastor, I used to tie my head with a scarf and go. Afterwards when I became hardened by life, I would buckle up my back and set off for the bushes of Papaya, south of Papaya hill. I would leave my children at home, give them some food, put them to sit on a chair and close the house. In the bushes I would pick shimaruku cherries and fill the basket and bag I carried. I would then go home, make some porridge for my children. Then I would get dressed and set off to town. In town I would sell the cherries. Walk and sell the cherries, so that I could get enough money to buy food and bring home. I would return home all by myself. At 8 o'clock in the evening I would reach the place called Jandoret, near Samí. I would stand and look at my house to see if there was any light. There would be no light. I would reach home and find my children clutched to each other, together with my husband. Because my husband did not have anything to give. Pastor, you know who has struggled with marital life? That is why I am all crippled now.

The Extended Family and Bida Drechi

Bolland (2002) states that following emancipation, many people in the Caribbean left the plantations in order to reunite with family members they were separated from during slavery; this relocation often resulted in new communities being created. Studies have shown that Afro-Caribbean families tend to be large and complex, with third and fourth generation family members playing important roles in the psychological and economic support of the group (Bolland 2002; Barrow and Reddock 2002).

During enslavement families of two or three generations were likely to be living on the same plantation (Jordaan 1999:488). After emancipation, families residing on a piece of land for a long period would often send a petition to the authorities, requesting a legalization of their position. They would strengthen their claim by stating that the land on which they had grown up had been handed down to them by their parents, who in turn had received it from their parents.

Even when people decided to leave the plantation where they lived – which often meant leaving some family members behind – the main consideration in selecting a plot of land would be the proximity of other family members. For example, Mathias Apostel abandoned his plan to continue looking for land after the district master told him that he could

only get a plot far from the plantation where his family still lived.⁴⁶ In another case Saxen, a former slave who had been chased from the plantation where he stayed after emancipation, lodging with his mother and sister, went to live on a neighbouring plantation, where his father, Bomba Nanja, was the overseer.⁴⁷ In order to accommodate his son, the overseer had asked the district master for permission to chop wood in order to repair his huts, claiming that he was building a kitchen and a storage room. The district master recorded that Bomba Nanja was instead building a third hut for family members from a neighbouring plantation.⁴⁸

Another example is Andries, who soon after emancipation broke his contract with the plantation owner to go and live with his father Jose on his land. In this case both father and son were punished as a deterrent to others.⁴⁹ These actions show that in one way or another, family members helped each other in order to become truly free. For many years this living pattern based on multigenerational family unions continued to exist in the kunuku. Several groups of the same family would live close to each other, sometimes on the same land, which had originally been given out to an ancestor. In the countryside one would find a collection of mudstone houses built over the years, as the family expanded.

Kinship was important as it determined one's identity. People were sometimes referred to by the name of their ancestors as well, long after these had died. For example, a man would be known by the name *Wan di defuntu Maria*: Wan, the son of the late Maria. This extended name was also used in official letters. Or sometimes one would even include three generations, as in the case of *Wan di Maria di Federica*: Wan, the son of Maria, daughter of Federica. The name could include male ancestors but this was less common.

Women in particular instilled in their children the importance of family relationships and passed on information about their relatives. In their stories they would remember those who had preceded them, the *avochi* (the ancestors). An informant states how she continued this tradition taught by her mother. In her account she also remarks that this custom was disappearing in the twentieth century.

*Mi mama tabata konta nos tur kos. Di nos famianan leu, leu. Mi yunan ta hari mashá ora mi buska pa sa famia di hende. Asina mi mama asiñami.*⁵⁰

My mother used to tell us everything. About our very distant families. My children laugh at me, when I try to find out about the families of other people. I have been taught this by my mother.

The emphasis on solid family relations is also found in the following narrative, in which a father teaches his children how to stay together as a family:

Mi tata a bisa nos: 'Mi yunan, boso ta krese. No buska nunka plaka, pasó si bo buska plaka bo ta pèrdè bida. Ma si bo buska hende lo bo tin bida largu.' Un tata tabatin shete yu. El a manda e yunan bai kòrta shete bara. Ora e baranan a bini, e di ku un di e yunan: 'Buta nan huntu anto kibra nan.' E yu a pone nan huntu. E di: 'Papa, mi no bo kibra nan.' E tata

Our father has told us: 'My children, you are growing up. Never seek money, because if you seek money, you will lose life. But if you seek people, you will have a long life.' A father had seven children and he sent them to cut wood and bring seven twigs. When they came with the twigs, he told one of them: 'Put them together and try to break them.' The child put

*di: 'Lòs nan awor, buta abou.' E di: 'Kibra awor.' E yu a kue nan unu unu, el a kibra nan. E tata di: 'Awor sí. Asina ta ku ora boso plama for di otro, ora bosonan n' ta uní ku otro mas, ta fásil pa boso kibra.'*²⁵¹

them together and said: 'Papa, I cannot break them.' Then the father said: 'Separate them and put them on the floor.' He continued: 'Break them now.' The child took the seven twigs, one by one and broke them. The father said: 'Now you can break them. You see, once you break the bond of being united you can easily be broken.'

The complexity of kinship is best illustrated in the array of names denoting family members, as highlighted in the following overview.

Table 8.1 Family Organization by Name and Nature of Relationship (Based on Oral Interviews)

Generation	Papiamentu	Standard English meaning	Nature of relationship
fourth ascending	tatarawela	mother or father of one's great-grandparents	consanguinity
third ascending	bisawela (wela grandi)	(great-grandparents) great-grandfather/mother	consanguinity
second ascending Tawela	wela grandfather	grandmother consanguinity	consanguinity
first ascending	mama	mother	consanguinity
	mama di kriansa	foster mother	marital, member of a community
	madrasa	stepmother	marital
	tata	father	consanguinity
	tata di kriansa	foster father	
	padraso	stepfather	
	tanta di parti di mama	aunt (on the mother's side)	consanguinity
	tio di parti di mama	uncle (on the mother's side)	consanguinity
	tanta di parti di tata	aunt (on the father's side)	consanguinity
	tio di parti di tata	uncle (on the father's side)	consanguinity
	aktu-primu	second cousin	consanguinity
	suegru/suegu	mother/father in law	marital
	kuñá	sister/brother in law	marital
	madrina/pepe	godmother	ritual kinship
	padrinu/padrino	godfather	ritual kinship
	padrinu tras di porta	godfather (in case of a child born out of wedlock)	ritual kinship
	yaya	nanny; also an elderly woman who carried the child at baptism	ritual kinship, social relationship

	menchi	a woman paid to breastfeed someone else's baby	member of a community/labour
ego's	ruman	brother/sister	consanguinity
	primu	cousin	consanguinity
	primu-ruman	the children of two sisters or two brothers are 'first cousins'	consanguinity
	ruman djafó	brother/sister born out of wedlock	consanguinity
	ruman di kriansa	foster brother/sister	community, consanguinity
	ruman parti di tata	brother/sister on the father's side	consanguinity
	ruman parti di mama	brother/sister on the mother's side	consanguinity
	kasá	wife/husband	marital
	bibá/kompañero di bida	common law wife/husband	common law
	kombles	rival of the wife	extramarital relationship
	ruman di lechi	boy/girl breastfed by the same woman	Work-relationship
first descending	yu	child	consanguinity
	yu di kas	child born in wedlock	consanguinity
	yu di kriansa	foster child	community
	entená	son or daughter of one of the persons forming a couple, accepted as a fully fledged child of that couple	marital relationship
	yu djafó	child born out of wedlock	consanguinity
	ihá	godchild	ritual kinship
second descending	nietu/ñetu	grandchild	consanguinity
third descending	nietu tuma nietu	grandchild in the third generation	consanguinity
fourth descending	kabai a skop e	grandchild in the fourth generation	consanguinity

This overview indicates that in the extended family system descent can easily be traced back to the third and fourth generations. There is a strong sense of consanguinity, especially on the mother's side. In most cases these blood or birth relationships would be referred to as *famia yegá*, the immediate family. But the distinction between the *famia yegá* and the *famia djaleu* (the further family) was very subjective.

People were related by the usual blood and marital ties or in some cases also by extramarital ties. In addition, rituals and work could determine relations. Blood relations were not always solely the result of a conjugal relationship. A cohabiting couple's offspring were also included in the kinship system, as were the offspring of extramarital relationships. The term *yu djafô* refers to a child born out of wedlock. In the female headed household with sequential monogamous relationships the brothers and sisters were called *ruman parti di mama* (brother or sister on the mother's side). Sometimes cousins of the same generation grew up as brothers and sisters. In this case they were called *primu-ruman* (cousin/sister-brother).

The prime value of family relationships lay in their capacity for support. Social problems in particular put in action the networks of interdependence within families. In many cases relatives would turn to each other for help in childrearing, when for example a mother had died during childbirth. The concept of *kriansa* manifested in the term *mama di krijansa* (foster mother), *yu di krijansa* (foster child) and *ruman di krijansa* (foster brother/sister) reflects the role of care in this situation. Sometimes the *yu di krijansa* was taken care of by women engaged in a same-sex relationship. Although this was an issue not much talked about openly, it was mentioned as a state existing among both men and women. The *kambrada*, where women lived together, often occurred due to the gender imbalance in society as men would emigrate in large numbers to look for work elsewhere or they would work as sailors on ships. These cohabiting women would adopt children from people who were unable to financially support their own children.

The network of help also became apparent in caring for a sick or elderly family member. It provided a shelter for those who had been given the 'ora di porta' by the plantation owner or who had been chased away from the plantation. The extended family proved useful and often provided help when necessary. Important events such as harvest, marriage, birth, first communion and death were shared within these relationships.

However, many people due to various reasons still found themselves outside these large family communities. For instance, the master of the fifth district mentions the case of a woman who had nobody to take care of her ill children.⁵² There was also the case of a family living in Santa Rosa: with the mother having fallen ill and the father being in prison, there was no one to care for the children: five year old John and three year old Jozef, an adopted orphan. The district master had to act as an intermediary placing these children for a fee of two guilders and fifty cents per month with a midwife, who had been recommended by the priest of Santa Rosa.⁵³

Another example was the case of Marcelina, who died in September 1908, leaving a nine month old baby in the care of a distant family member who had taken care of the child when the mother was ill and continued to do so for a few months after she had died. When the woman needed to go to town to look for work, she could no longer care for the child. Neither the sister of the deceased nor the grandfather could look after the child. Finally the woman took the baby to the district master in the hope that he would find a family willing to look after it.⁵⁴

One of the customs in this context was that of ritual kinship, such as created at baptism, first communion and marriage. At baptism the parents would chose as godparents people who had attained a position of prominence and respect within the community.

This could be based on their level of education or their financial position. Baptismal godparents played an important role in the life of the child. They shared financial responsibility, as the godmother (*madrina*) had to provide for the layette (the garments for the baby), while at the first communion she would also be responsible for the child's outfit. The godfather was expected to cover some of the expenses incurred at these ceremonies, which were usually accompanied by exuberant celebrations; also he would give the godmother a present. The *madrina-ihá* (godmother and godchild) relationship was very important, as the godmother was considered a second mother to the child. She had to give her approval to important life choices and in case of the mother's death she became responsible for the child. Godmothers in particular were chosen for their high moral standards.

*Madrina i padrino ta skohé pa wela. Nan mester ta hende di bon famia i ta biba un bida drechi. E madrina mester ta 'señorita'. E no tabatin mag di tin yu ni ta bibá ku niun hende. E mester tabata saká for di kas di su mayornan. E padrino sí por tabata un tiki mas bieu i por tabata un hende kasá kaba. Ta importante ku e padrino tabatin un bon trabou. Esei ta pa kubri e gastunan di boutismo i sigui duna e ihá regalo i sèn. E madrina tambe mester a haña regalo serka e padrino.*⁵⁵

The grandmother chose the godparents. They had to be people of a good family and had to live a respectable life. The godmother had to be a virgin. She must not have any child, nor be living with anyone. She had to be taken from the house of her parents (by her prospective husband). The godfather could be older and could be married. It was important that he had a good job. That is to cover the expenses of baptism and to continue to give the godchild presents and money. The godmother also had to receive a present from him.

The terms *commere/compere* and *commadre/compadre* were used as terms of address for the godmother and godfather at baptism. It imbued in them an important position in the family system. The *padrino* and *madrina di kasamentu* (patron and matron of honour) were assigned during the marriage in Church. They accompanied the married couple during the Church service and the couple could turn to them in the event of marital problems.

Conclusion

In this Chapter I have described social relations within the private realm. I elaborated on this by using the concept of 'bida drechi' introduced by the Catholic Church to pinpoint what was seen as proper family life: a monogamous relationship between a man and a woman sanctioned by civil but principally religious marriage. In the male-oriented ideology of the Catholic Church the concept of 'bida drechi' upheld patriarchy as proper family life and perpetuated gender inequality in the family. Women were considered unequal to men as they had to maintain passive and reproductive roles within the family. They were primarily seen as wives and mothers.

In a sense people embraced this value system. Civil and religious marriage was considered respectable, unlike the common cohabiting practice of the 'bibá' and the 'kompaná'. When legal marriage was financially possible, it was celebrated and performed as a means of gaining prestige. It was also an important determinant of what was seen as being a good

Catholic and carried with it social advantages for the couple and for their future children, who could attend Catholic schools. Children coming from 'bon famia' – a formally married couple – were given preferential treatment by nuns and priests at school.

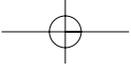
The local male-dominated ideology is also evident in the male perception of the correct behaviour of women and determined the ways in which men behaved towards women. Women were therefore doubly subjugated; first by the social system and, in family life, by their own partner or husband.

Yet poverty made it difficult for people to maintain the moral code of the *bida drechi*. Due to poverty, people migrated within and beyond the shores of the island, which affected how well couples could and would live up to this model of family life. While the men were absent, women could display their autonomous roles more clearly within the norms of respectability set for married life.

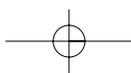
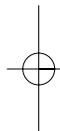
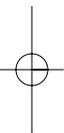
Notes

- 1 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Rol van Strafzaken 1890, Procesverbaal no. 32.
- 2 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Rol van Strafzaken 1878, Procesverbaal no. 24.
- 3 Interview Helena Koeks (born 1903), Jeanne Henriquez/Allen, July 1992 (NatAr). Oral History Project in preparation of the documentary 'Bosnan skondi' (Hidden Voices), by Jeanne Henriquez and Rose Mary Allen, July 1992, Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology of the Netherlands Antilles and Centre for the Development of Women (SEDA).
- 4 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Ingekomen stukken, 3e district, inv. no. 42, 18-1-1889/42.
- 5 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Administratie van Financiën, 1892, 31-12-1897/611, 524.
- 6 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Administratie van Financiën, 1892, 4-6-1895/59.
- 7 Interview Chita Martina (born 21-5-1911), Brenneker/Juliana, 29-7-1982 (T 82, Fundashon Biblioteca Públika Kòrsou).
- 8 'Kompa' is a common term for a very close male friend.
- 9 Interview Gerardo Rosario (born 1877, living in Banda Riba (Zikinzá-collection, T 759 and T 761, NatAr).
- 10 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Rol van Strafzaken 1872, Procesverbaal no. 37, 30; Rol van Strafzaken 1881, Procesverbaal no. 13.
- 11 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Rol van Strafzaken 1881, Procesverbaal no. 13.
- 12 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Rol van Strafzaken 1871, Procesverbaal no. 12.
- 13 Story told by Virginia Meulens (born 1869; Zikinzá-collection, T 438, NatAr).
- 14 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Rol van Strafzaken, Criminele en Correctionele Teregtzitting 10-11-1871, Procesverbaal no. 43.
- 15 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Rol van Strafzaken 1907, Procesverbaal no. 69, 74.
- 16 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Rol van Strafzaken 1907, Procesverbaal no. 10.
- 17 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Rol van Strafzaken 1905, Procesverbaal no. 18.
- 18 See for example the court case in which Rosita was accused of calling Betsy in public (in front of her home) a stinking whore and a shameless thief because she had failed to make the brims for the straw hats on payment as they had agreed upon five days earlier, arguing that her child was ill. Rosita had asked Betsy to return her wooden crown, but she had failed to do so (NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Rol van Strafzaken, Criminele en Correctionele Teregtzitting 1872, Procesverbaal no. 31).
- 19 The mistress of the husband.

- 20 Brenneker 1970:1804.
- 21 Sung by Michi Rosina, born 1926 (Zikinzá-collection, T 1022, NatAr).
- 22 The songs for women were categorized as follows: religion, children, love, satire and work. Moreover, through lullabies (*kantika pa hasi mucha drumi*) mothers interacted with their babies. Other songs were sung communally, such as those forming part of storytelling and ring-game activities.
- 23 See also the story by Juliana about Anita, who lived in the town area (Monte Verde). In the year her daughter Rosa started cohabiting with a busdriver in Pietermaai she sang ‘shonnan, m’a perde mi rosa, yor’e’ (People I have lost my rose, help me cry). Juliana 1981:18.
- 24 Even animal calls could be interpreted as a sign that a woman was pregnant without being married. The typical scream of an owl, for example, warned a mother that her daughter was pregnant (Brenneker 1966:23).
- 25 Interview Didi Sluis (born 1904), Allen/Ernest Gaari, 14-4-1984 (NatAr).
- 26 Interview Eligio Maduro (born 1886), Brenneker/Juliana, 1959 (Zikinzá-collection, T 1066, NatAr).
- 27 Zimalai is a Guene word, translated by Martinus as ‘forgiveness’ (1997:199).
- 28 Interview Gerardo Rosario (born 1877), Brenneker/Juliana, 1958 (Zikinzá-collection, T 318, NatAr).
- 29 Interview Nicolaas Petronia (born 1898), Allen, 9-6-1986 (NatAr).
- 30 Interview Carlitu Martina (born 1905), Brenneker/Juliana, 25-4-1984 (T 101, Fundashon Biblioteka Públiko Kòrsou’).
- 31 Interview Elsie Solassa (born 1938), Allen, 15-3-2000 (NatAr). His grandmother, who was born in 1887, used to tell him many narratives.
- 32 Hendrikse-Rigaud 1994:248.
- 33 Interview Rosa Isabela (born 1900), Brenneker/Juliana, 1959 (Zikinzá-collection, T 579, NatAr).
- 34 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Rol van Strafzaken 1878, Procesverbaal no. 24.
- 35 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5 district, inv. no. 127, 16-4-1867.
- 36 Idem, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 2e district, inv. no. 138, 31-7-1903/121.
- 37 Kerstgeschenk 1883:215.
- 38 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Rol van Strafzaken 1879, Procesverbaal no. 4. Hose had been allowed to remain on his former plantation to weave baskets which he sold to the owner.
- 39 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Rol van Strafzaken 1874, Procesverbaal no. 2.
- 40 Interview Felix Martina (born 21-2-1894), Brenneker/Juliana, 28-3-1978 (T 62, Fundashon Biblioteka Públiko Kòrsou).
- 41 Unable to translate.
- 42 Interview Eduardo Tokaai (born 1899), Allen, 12-9-1984 (NatAr).
- 43 Unable to translate.
- 44 Interview Lodewijk Hooi (born 1879), Brenneker/Juliana, 1959 (Zikinzá-collection, T 470, NatAr).
- 45 Interview Nana Demalia (born 1873), Brenneker/Juliana, 1958 (Zikinzá-collection, T 473, NatAr).
- 46 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken, 2e district, inv. no. 132, 4-12-1874/49.
- 47 NA, Ministerie van Koloniën, 1850-1900, inv. no. 6740, 12-6-1865/337.
- 48 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, inv. no. 125, 23-5-1863/5, inv. no. 126, 9-6-1865/76 and inv. no. 127, 30-10-1866/164 ; NA, Ministerie van Koloniën, 1850-1900, inv. no. 6740, 12-6-1865/337.
- 49 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, inv. No. 127, 26-4-1866/45, zie ook NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, inv. no 127, 28-4-1866.
- 50 Interview Altagracia Regina (born 2-5-1910), by Brenneker/Juliana, 6-6-1985 (T 110, Fundashon Biblioteka Públiko Kòrsou).
- 51 Interview Maria Pieters (born 1878), Brenneker/Juliana, 1958 (Zikinzá-collection, T 516, NatAr).



- 52 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, inv. no. 125, 25-7-1863/35.
- 53 Idem, inv. no. 131, 28-3-1869/35, 12.
- 54 Idem, inv. no. 164, 9-11-1908/348.
- 55 Interview Virginia Meulens (born 1869), Brenneker/Juliana, 1959 (Zikinzá-collection, T 440, NatAr).



CHAPTER IX

Tambú di bida: An Afro-Curaçaoan Concept of Life

This Chapter examines Afro-Curaçaoans' spiritual outlook on life. I am particularly interested in how Afro-Curaçaoans reflected on and conducted their lives in the context of the material and social conditions as described in Chapters VII and VIII. Some studies have approached this from the perspective of Afro-Curaçaoans' religiosity, within the context of the meaning and value systems the Roman Catholic Church introduced into their lives.¹ Most of these scholars have stated that the Church had power over Afro-Curaçaoans and that it determined how they conducted their lives.

Here, however, I would like to examine their outlook on life not only as a response to Roman Catholic beliefs and practices – and in that way as an acculturated form of Roman Catholicism – but also as a way which gives credence to their own values and moral code. Barbara Kopytoff argues that people who have been converted to other religions retain something of their traditional beliefs and combine these in various ways with the new vision of the world they are offered (1987:463). Indeed, the Afro-Curaçaoan outlook on life has also been influenced by their own or their ancestors' experience of being enslaved.

I use the term *tambú di bida*, which Brenneker and Juliana recorded during an interview with Felix Martina.² He used this concept as a metaphor for life similar in essence to the saying 'Manera tambú ta bai, sanká ta bai'. Literally: 'that the buttocks go in the way the drum beats', thus representing flexibility. It is not surprising that the interviewee equated the musical instrument of the tambú (drum) with life, since music played a primary role in the lives of Afro-Curaçaoans. But the word tambú has several additional meanings. It referred to the most important instrument of the tambú celebration held in the months around the end and the beginning of the year, as well as accompanying the *kantika di tambú*.³ The drum determined the rhythm of the dance and led the movements of the dancers. By comparing life with a tambú performance the interviewee focused on the necessity to be flexible in life.

But tambú also meant perseverance, as it was one of the traditional African customs able to persist despite the prohibition of this celebration (Rosalia 1997). During slavery the practice was forbidden by the slave-owners, as they feared the propagation of dissent and rebelliousness. It was also condemned by the Catholic clergy, who called the dance lascivious and sexually immoral. Members of the older generation still relate the severe ways in which the clergy punished those found participating in a tambú celebration. This punishment included the confiscation of the drums, whipping and even the expulsion of those participating from the Catholic Church.

René Rosalia, who studied the tambú and listed its different functions, considered it a way through which the lower class undermined the rules of those with political and economic power (1997:91-110). For him the tambú was an expression of subaltern resistance to class and racial values in society. Rosalia described the tambú as a way of life in which the enslaved – and following emancipation the workers and farm labourers – expressed their spiritual beliefs. He compared it with other manifestations in the Caribbean, such as the *calinda* of Trinidad, the *winti* of Suriname, the *palo monte* of Cuba and the *candomblé* and *macumba* of Brazil (2002:1).

But tambú was more than a form of resistance against the control of the dominating class. In a male-female relationship it was also an expression of female power. For women, participating in the tambú meant contravening what was deemed respectable behaviour, since a respectable life would have held them hidden in the privacy of their own homes. No 'respectable' woman would be expected to participate in the tambú and those who did – either by organizing it, singing, clapping their hands, dancing or merely as onlookers – were condemned and labelled bad women (Witteveen 1992:107-17). Women who performed as tambú singers (*kantadó di tambú*) moved in the public domain and went beyond the boundaries set by male-dominated society. They showed assertiveness and courage in the composition and presentation of their songs. As singers they had the ability to introduce lyrics with which they could verbally whip people.

In general, the tambú songs are characterized by the use of cunning word-play and double entendre. The lyrics were carefully thought out in order to trigger the desired response from the singers, dancers, drummers and onlookers. They commented on events that had happened during the year and which were generally disapproved of. They also referred to individuals, either from within or outside the community, who had misbehaved during the year.⁴

The tambú strengthened social cohesion among Afro-Curaçaoans of the lower class. They would gather in the yard of a house or in a public area to perform the tambú. However, some members of the white elite also participated in these celebrations, much to the disgust of the State and the Roman Catholic Church.⁵ One of these was known as the *tambú di señorita* (tambú of virgins), which Rosalia described in his thesis as a private tambú celebration for rich merchants to which Afro-Curaçaoan tambú players and young, unmarried Afro-Curaçaoan women were invited.⁶ Furthermore, people of the elite class would request tambú singers to improvise a song which insulted their rivals in tambú form.⁷ It was also generally known that they would often conclude their home parties with a tambú, while they were heavily intoxicated. The transcendence of social class barriers, resulting in the participation of the white elite class in the tambú celebration, their use of the tambú to transmit their own coded messages – even though it was surrounded by much taboo and secrecy – shows that the tambú had become creolized in one form or another. This attitude portrayed by the elite goes against Römer's understanding of creolization, which he sees as 'the westernization of Africans' and at the same time 'a less-desired Africanization of the white elite group' (Römer 1993:20). Tambú was able to transcend ethnic boundaries despite interference from those with power.

This aspect of creolization has been insufficiently covered by Rosalia, who dealt with the expression solely from the perspective of resistance. The notion of tambú as resistance

is contradicted when in the beginning of the twentieth century some plantation owners began to allow the celebration on their land. This is said to have happened on the plantations of San Juan and Savaneta (Rosalia 1997:137-9) and on Porto Mari (Allen 2001b:46). Both the anthropologist Jennie Smith (2001:54-5) and Richard Burton (1997:264) confirm that this phenomenon took place in the rest of the Caribbean. Smith studied these types of expressions in Haiti, which were also forbidden by those with power. She states that this music genre began to be accepted as the status quo, as those with power used it against their opponents and it served to take people's minds of their problems (2001:54-5).

Considering all of these characteristics of the tambú, one should bear in mind the concept of the tambú di bida when looking at how Afro-Curaçaoans perceived themselves and the reality in which they lived. 'Tambú di bida' thus reflects several paradoxical characteristics. On the one hand it meant coping with destiny, whereby life's events were seen as inescapable and irrevocable, while on the other hand it also meant people performing as active agents, taking control of their own lives. Yet they were only able to perform within the social context allowed by the dominant class. This supports the idea of a double-edged Afro-Caribbean culture, whereby opposition to dominance and living in freedom can only occur within the social parameters and boundaries set by those dominating (Burton 1997). This leads to a paradox of accepting life as an inescapable series of events versus life as a continuous challenge to come to grips with.

Afro-Curaçaoan's Cosmology

I will start by looking at the notion of 'tambú di bida' within the context of what is called cosmology in anthropology. Joy Hendry defines cosmology as the ideas and explanations of people about the world they live in and their place in the world (1999:115). Their reflection about self and their place in life is expressed in religious thought. Most expressions attest God as the Supreme Being in life. Afro-Curaçaoans referred to God as *Dio*' or *Djo*, derived from the concept *Dios*, the Christian name for God in Spanish. The terms *Waze* or *Weze*, meaning God in Guene, sound closer to African cultures. In some *seú* songs God was also referred to by the name *Shon Grandi* (Upper Master), thus drawing parallels to the power and authority of the slave-owner.⁸

God was believed to control fate and his power was evident in all aspects of life, such as the search for work, whether or not it would rain and the potential of a newly dug well. God was especially referred to in relation to food and water, essential conditions not always available to Curaçaoans. Thus it was primarily in agriculture that God's life-giving powers were felt and recognized. The proverb 'Si Dios ke e ta manda awaseru' (Everything depends on God's blessing), for example, expresses this belief (Hendrikse-Rigaud 1994:161). It was during agricultural work that Afro-Curaçaoans made most of their songs referring to God.

There were several agricultural rituals aimed at channeling divine power to attain a good harvest. After the land had been cleared and prepared and before the planting would start, a ritual would be performed asking God for permission to cultivate the land. This was done by stamping one's feet on the ground and by singing the following song, the lyrics of which are partly in Guene and partly in Papiamentu. Over the years the meaning

of some of the words has been lost, making a direct translation impossible. However, it is certain that it focuses on greeting the land before cultivating it.

Simudato lag'é
Ban kuminda tera awé
Kumindamentu pa tera awé
*Simudato lag'é.*⁹

Simudato lag'é
Let us salute the land today
Salutations to the land today
Simudato lag'é

After performing this ritual, the planting began. During the whole agricultural process the protection of God was requested. At harvest time, some songs also referred to God's involvement and were an expression of gratitude.¹⁰ During the first phase of planting mainly spiritual songs were sung to greet God. The song 'Shon Grandi a duna. Ta Tata di shelu a duna' (The Big Master has given. It is the Father in heaven who has given) was usually sung at the opening of the harvest celebration.¹¹

The following song was sung while picking the millet during the harvest ceremony, giving thanks to God for the harvest.

O, yama danki
O, yama danki na Señor
O, yama danki
O, yama danki
Mi di,
*yama danki na Señor.*¹²

O, give thanks
O, give thanks to the Lord
O, give thanks
O, give thanks
I said,
give thanks to the Lord

In the following song God is again praised for his help in providing a good harvest. It also focuses on reciprocal help and cooperation as essential aspects of harvesting.

Ai Djo ee, Limaninan
Bosonan tur bin kompañami awe
Awe mes Shon Dios a duna
Mi bunitanan bosnan bin kompañami
Awe mes, Shon Dios a duna
Shon Dios a duna awe ee,
Shon Dios a duna
Awe mes, Shon Dios ta duna eee
Limanaze, mira kon Shon Dios a duna nos
Limanaze, Shon Dios a duna nos awe
*Mi Limanaze, mira kon Shon Dios a duna.*¹³

Oh God, Limaninan
Come and accompany me today all of you
Today Master God has given
Nice people, come and accompany me
Today Master God has given
Master God has given today,
Master God has given
Today, Master God has given, eah
Limanaze, look how Master God has given us
Limanaze, Master God has given today
My Limanaze, look how Master God has given.

This reliance on God for a successful harvest must be acknowledged. It was a taboo not to recognize his power. The following story shows what might happen if the taboo is broken. Again God manifests his power in the natural world. In the Afro-Curaçaoans' religious beliefs the physical world is animated and no distinction is made between animals and human beings. In this particular case the dog assumes characteristics of a human being and is able to communicate with people. But as it misuses this ability it is punished.

Dios Tata tabatin un kachó ku por a papia. A bin sosodé ku Tata ta sali bai keiru kuné, anto tin un hòmber, ku ta traha su kunuku. Dios a mir'è i El a puntr'é: 'Ki dia bo ta kaba e kunuku akí?' E hòmber di: 'Mañan.' E no a bisa: 'Mañan ku Dios ke.' Dios no a gusta i El a bai. Ora nan a yega kas i e kachó a kere ku Tata ta na soño, e ke men ku Tata no ta mir'è, – pero Tata ta mira nos ku un orea, i tende nos ku un wowo – e kachó a kore yega serka e hòmber. El a papia. E di kuné: 'E hòmber, esun ku mi sa kana kuné no, ta Dios. Ora e puntrabo ki dia e kunuku ta kaba, bo ta bis'é: Mañan, ku Dios ke.' Ya Tata tabata sa kaba ku e kachó a bai reda. E siguiente dia Tata a kumindá e hòmber: 'Kon ta bai, bon hòmber, kon ta bai?' E hòmber di: 'Bon.' Tata di kuné: 'Ki dia e kunuku akí ta kaba?' E di ku Tata: 'Mañan ku Dios ke.' Tata a drei bisa e kachó: 'Tende lo bo tende, mira lo bo mira, ma papia sí lo bo no papia.' Ta p'esei kachó a keda ta hou, hou, keda hou, hou te datu dia djawe.¹⁴

God had a dog that could talk. Once God went to take a walk with his dog and they met a man who was working on the land. God asked him: 'When will you finish your work on the land?' The man answered: 'Tomorrow.' He did not say: 'Tomorrow with God's will.' God did not like this and left. When they returned home and the dog thought that God was asleep and he thought that God could not see him – but God sees us with one ear, and listens to us with one eye – he ran to the man. He spoke and said to him: 'The man, the one I usually walk with, is God. When He asks you when the work on the land will be finished, you must tell Him: 'Tomorrow, with God's will.' But God already knew that the dog had gone gossiping. The next day God asked the man: 'How are you, my good man, how are you?' He said: 'Good.' God asked him then: 'When will you finish working on your land?' The man said: 'Tomorrow, with God's will.' God then turned to his dog and said: 'You will hear, you will see, but you will not be able to talk.' That is why until this very day dogs can only say woof, woof, woof.

The following story which was transmitted by fishermen to the narrator is a reflection about man's place in nature. It again shows a flexible relationship between God, human beings and nature, whereby the power of God is recognized as being all-pervading. It also contains some terms in Guene, indicating African cultural connotations. In more specific terms, this story tries to explain why the sea at the northern coast of Curaçao, where fishermen also throw their lines to fish, is so rough and needs to be respected. Indirectly the story promotes the virtue of modesty, a value which is stressed in other forms. The overconfident sea is put in its place by God.

Laman a puntra Dios si e por a lag'é buta un pia riba tera. Anto Dios di kuné: 'Nò, si mi 'nabo un pia riba tera, bo ta kaba ku mundu na awa.' Laman a rabia i el a kanta:

*T'ami ta laman, eeah
Konalowé
Konalowé, Laman é
Konalowé*

The sea asked God if he could come ashore and God told him: 'No, if I give you the possibility to place your feet on land, you will flood the world.' The sea became angry and began to sing:

*I am the sea, eeah
Konalowé
Konalowé, the sea, eeah
Konalowé*

*Laman a rabia anto Dios a para ta mir'è.
Laman a dal un saltu, spat den laria dos biaha.*

The sea got angry and God stood there and looked at him and the sea jumped up, and

Ora su rabia a baha, Dios di kuné: 'Bo tin ku wardami anto awor.' Dios di kuné: 'Mi por dunabo un hende tur dia pa kuminda, pero si mi 'nabo un pia riba tera, bo ta kaba ku mundu na awa.' Anto e ora ei Dios a bis'é:

Akanasia makamba
Awe ta mundu a tres'é
Ke desir ta mundu a tres'é.

Ta Dios a kanta e kantika ei. Anto Dios di kuné: 'Bo ta mira e baranka aki? E baranka a lanta, el a krese bira altu.' Despues Dios di kuné: 'Maske kon bo sapatia, maske kon bo rabia, maske kon bo bira, bo ta bin dal den e baranka aki bai laria, pasa djei mes subi.'

C.M.: Hahaha, pasó si Dios dunabo un pia riba tera bo ta kaba mundu na awa.¹⁵

splashed twice. When he calmed down, God told him: 'You have to wait for me, now.' God told him: 'I can give you everyday a human being as food, but if I allow you to set foot on land, you will flood the world.' And then God told him:

Akanasia makamba
Today it is the world which brought him
Meaning that the world brought him.

God sang the song. Then God said to him: 'You see this rock? The rock was born and grew tall.' Then God said to him: 'No matter how high you jump, no matter how angry you get, no matter what you turn into, you will have to splash against this very rock, jump up high and from there you will come ashore.'

C.M.: Hahaha, because if God gives you the chance to come ashore, you will flood the world.

God's presence was also recognized in social relationships. It was customary for people to greet each other by saying *Djidjo*, a contraction of the words *Dia pa Djo* (*Dios*). Or one might say *Djidjo, mi ruman, Djidjo* (The day is for God, my brother/sister, the day is for God) (Juliana 1977a:221). Following this, one might inquire into the well-being of the person's family. Or they would greet each other by saying *kuminda Weze* or *kuminda Waze*, terms greeting God. Upon leaving, reference would again be made to God: *Te mañan ku Dios ke* (Till tomorrow with God's will). This demonstration of religiosity in the use of religious idiom for enhancing social relationships was also clear in the term *Diosolopaga* (God will bless you), when thanking someone. All these expressions stem from the concept of a Supreme Being determining everyone's lives. This was also manifest when one made plans for the future ('No por buta fiho') without mentioning 'with God's will'. The interviewee Eduardo Tokaai explained this religious outlook, which he applied in daily life:

E.T.: P'esei nan ta bisa: 'Te mañan ku Dios ke.' Asina nan ta bisa. Bo no por bisa 'te mañan'. Bo no tin òrdu di bisa 'te mañan'. Bo mester bisa 'te mañan ku Dios ke'. Anto e ora ei Dios ta sa ku bo fe ta den Dios. Pasó si Dios n' ke, bo no por yega mañan. Awor ta hende ku ta papia sin pensa kon palabra mester ta. 'Te mañan...?' Nò, bo n' sa. Bo por muri awé.¹⁶

E.T.: That is why people would say: 'Till tomorrow with God's will.' So they say. You must not say 'till tomorrow'. You are not allowed to. You must say: 'Till tomorrow with God's will.' Then God will know that you have faith in Him. Because if God doesn't want to, you cannot see tomorrow. Nowadays people talk without thinking how they have to say the words. 'Till tomorrow...?' You don't know. You may die today.

Artifacts were used to petition the help of the Supreme Being, thus revealing a synthesis with Roman Catholicism. For example, the *rosario* (rosary) was an important instrument for expressing religious belief. In 1856 a priest signaled that people wore rosaries around their necks as a sign of bearing the Catholic faith.¹⁷ Besides as an instrument of prayer it was also used as a charm when placed around the neck. Some people used it for good health; in cases of illness it was used as a means to aid recovery. These artifacts were believed to be infused with a special force and in that way would help the wearer.

Besides God, saints were believed to have power in determining one's destiny. One could request their divine intervention in difficult situations. Havisser's study (1987) based on the excavation of an Afro-Curaçaoan dwelling house on plantation Knip uncovered various statues which were used in homes, representing the cosmology of Afro-Curaçaoans. The use of Catholic statues to evoke help again indicates a syncretism. Afro-Catholic religion centered on the worship of saints and rites conducted before altars at home.¹⁸ These saints could also be portrayed in pictures which would be displayed in the homes. They were venerated in privacy at home or during ceremonies among a group of devotees.

The principal saint at that time was San Antonio de Padua (*San Antoni*), celebrated on the 13th of June.¹⁹ In the celebrations in his honour, called the *lele Tony*, people would congregate on nine consecutive days, the so-called *novena*, with the ceremony on the last day being the most elaborate. At some of these ceremonies people would dance to the rhythm of the drum in front of an altar upon which would be fruit, candles and rum. To this saint they would make a request. People would ask for the good health of their loved ones.²⁰ Single women turned to San Antonio when looking for a good husband, while married women turned to him in order to secure a good marriage, fertility, as well as well-behaved and healthy children. Farmers would petition for rain while fishermen would carry an image of the saint in their pockets to ward off dangers at sea or to request a good catch. In town, people would ask for money.

People's expectations of the saints were high and should they fail to meet their wishes the saints were punished. For example, the model of the saint would be turned with his back to the people, the little child he carried would be removed or he would be placed upside down in water. This idea of punishing saints who did not grant people their requests is also present in the history of western religiosity, as the Dutch anthropologist Gerard Rooijackers demonstrated in his study of rural people in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe (1994:145).

According to the anthropologist Richenel Ansano, these celebrations for the saints also enforced group affinity. He was informed in an interview with Ciro Eleonora, a Curaçaoan key informant on culture, that during these celebrations there would be extensive donations of food. Groups of people would put aside food in order to contribute to this feast for the whole community (Ansano 1988:23; 1990:188-9). This indicates that these celebrations were a way of meeting the practical needs of individuals. Food in this sense implied more than physical nourishment; it was used to emphasize group formation (Wilk 1999:245).

San Juan was venerated in an elaborate fashion on the 24th of June. On that day people with a name derived from Juan were recognized. The rituals of this celebration were accompanied by music and songs and focused on requesting rain to ensure a successful harvest (Rosalia 1997:119). San Pedro was celebrated on the 29th of June to ensure the

well-being of fishermen. These rituals related to the satisfaction of people's basic needs and tell us what Afro-Curaçaoans considered important in their lives.

In addition to the Roman Catholic icons, the Afro-Curaçaoans' spiritual domain encompassed a vast array of supernatural forces, including good and evil spirits relating to the deceased. The evil spirits, named *zumbi*, were the souls of people who had lived a bad life; their punishment was to dwell among the living and cause them harm.²¹ They were also called *alma malu* (bad soul) or *spiritu malu* (bad spirit). According to Brenneker they were sometimes equated with the devil and were therefore also called *djabel* or *satanas*. They were mostly active in the evening and rested at midday under the tamarind or in the manzaliña tree (*Hippomane mancinella*) (Brenneker 1966:20, 32). People would draw crosses on their fences, walls, trees and front doors in order to deter evil spirits (Latour 1949; Brenneker 1966:5). Sorcerers (*hasidó di brua*) could release these evil forces to harm people (Latour 1948b:239).

Spirit worship was sometimes conducted before altars at home (Brenneker 1969:688-91). According to van Meeteren, one of the first scholars to write on *brua* practices on Curaçao, *brua* was not always associated with evil. The *hasidó di brua* could, for example, also be a person with knowledge of medicinal herbs (1947:149). The priest Latour, by contrast, called *brua* practices *Vudún*, as these were commonly known in Haiti. In an article 'Voodoo op Curaçao' (1949), he perceived these practices as superstition. According to him they had not developed widely on the island, as the slaves had not been allowed to congregate and due to the civilizing work done after emancipation by Dutch priests. In the 1960s Brenneker studied the phenomenon of *brua* together with Juliana, as a collective term for sorcery, charlatanism, spiritualism, superstition and everything that goes beyond the limits of the natural world (Brenneker 1966:1, 7).

A rather neutral definition of *brua* is given by Ansano, who defines it (1988:9; 1990:174) in a more functionalist way, as an agglomeration of non-Christian spiritual practices, similar to the *obeah*²² of the British West Indies, including preparing and using lucky charms, eliminating purported and declared enemies, healing physical illnesses and social relationships, ensnaring spouses, divining, making amulets, possessing spirits and consulting the dead. What he did not mention is that in addition *brua* can be used to negate a curse, in a similar fashion as *obeah* (Simpson 1980:189). In most of these definitions *brua* is described as something stemming from the mind of primitive people, with the intention of causing harm to a third person. In my study on *hasidó di brua* I deduced that *brua* worked on two levels, either doing harm or good, depending on the nature of the request. Evil practices entailed the use of paraphernalia and rituals with the intention of harming somebody. However, the same person might perform a service with good intentions, such as curing someone.

The presence of *brua* practitioners in Curaçaoan society during slavery was studied by Rutten (1989, 1999, 2003). Also following emancipation, some cases were identified which can be linked to these practices. For example, part of a testimony in a court case of 14 May 1872 dealing with the theft of a baby vest, mentioned that a fifteen year old girl from town had sent someone to buy oil for her lamp in order to see who had stolen her baby vest.²³ This could be interpreted as a form of divination whereby the person through communicating with the world of spirits tried to discover the identity of the thief. *La Union* of 15

May 1893 reported that during three consecutive days different houses had burned down in Banda Bou and that people attributed this to the negative force of *brua* or sorcery. Another example was a complaint made in 1911 to the district master in which a person called Lica who lived in town was accused of practicing sorcery by Amanda and Devilla; according to them she had swindled them of their money, thus also indicating a financial aspect to *brua* practices.²⁴

In the same year the master of the third district, a rural area, had to take action when a whole neighbourhood had carried a mature woman around in a hammock and physically abused her before returning her to her home in an unconscious state.²⁵ Malicious gossip suggested that she was to blame for the disappearance of a certain 35 year old Victor, who had left his home one evening never to return.²⁶ People believed that she could float between heaven and earth and had evil powers. This type of action could be taken to further extremes, as in the case of the assassination of Rosa on Bonaire, a Curaçaoan woman accused of being a sorcerer, a *hasidó di brua*. They found her corpse stabbed seven times and her head crushed by a stone.²⁷

Orlando Patterson (1967:185) claims that people accused of witchcraft were often people not abiding by the social norms and were therefore considered by the community to be unsociable. Success and conspicuous happiness often engendered envy. This was also the case for two women whose stories were carried on in the oral tradition and who lived in the twentieth century. Juliana and Brenneker were able to collect the story of one of them, Katalina Beleku, who lived in the eastern part of the island. Both women had their own shops and were very enterprising (Clemencia 1996:83-91).²⁸ People attributed their success to the fact that they danced with *Almasola*, an evil spirit who gave but demanded something in return. The other one was accused of being able to transform into an animal at will.

According to Brenneker (1969) and Ansano (1988) women in particular were believed to form a pact with *Almasola*, who promised material prosperity (money, houses, land and jewelry) in exchange for the sacrifice of human lives. As a symbol of this pact *Almasola* would come every night to a specific place to dance with the woman. Ansano further states that in the early part of the twentieth century the *baile ku Almasola* developed around the city of Willemstad, lasting well into the 1960s (1988:4). Brenneker (1969:691) records that in Banda Bou other women were believed to be dancing with *Almasola*, revealing a dispersion of the custom on the island.

In his book *Brua* (1966) Brenneker gave an overview of several evil spirits who at the time formed part of Afro-Curaçaoan cosmology. The following Table is based on his collection.

Table 9.1 Names and Characteristics of Evil Spirits in the Nineteenth and the Beginning of the Twentieth Century on Curaçao

No	Names	Characteristics
1	Almasola	An evil spirit who promises material prosperity in exchange for human lives.
2	Boli' fuego	A fireball which in the evening is carried in an open dish by a mother as punishment for killing her child.
3	Dambala	A powerful spirit.
4	Djanco	The leader of evil spirits, who is seen principally during Lent.
5	Kabes di kadaver	Synonym for Djanco.
6	Kumbu	A luminous erring spirit.
7	Djengelé	A spirit.
8	Doño di Santana	A spirit who owns the graveyard. Also named San Elia.
9	Gungu	An erring spirit.
10	Kofi	A luminous erring spirit.
11	Lehi	A luminous erring spirit.
12	Lèngè	Another term for Zeh.
13	Onzegbá	Someone with the ability to become invisible, roaming and causing harm.
14	Zeh	Someone who can remove a person's skin and fly through the air at night in search of a new born child from which it can suck blood. It was believed that by throwing salt on the skin of <i>Zeh</i> or <i>èzè</i> (or <i>lèngè</i>) it would leave and never return.

The spirit *Damballah* was mentioned in a song by Damasio Hooi, born in 1887 without legs and missing his right hand. The mention of the name *Damballah* shows that he had some knowledge of the belief-system in Haiti, where *Damballah* (or *Dambala Wèdo*) was an ancient snake deity predominantly present in the Vodún religion. In this song, Hooi, alias Kokoti, tells *Damballah* that although he is a crippled goat, he knows how to get his food on the mountain rock. It is uncertain whether Kokoti's comparison of himself to a goat stems from *Damballah* being a deity who likes goat meat.²⁹ If this is the case it also indicates some knowledge of this religious practice.

Another spirit that people appeared to use was the *Doño di santana* or the *San Elia*, who surrounded graves and graveyards. Latour (1949:239) in his review of *The Virgin Islands and their People* (1944) by J. Antonio Jarvis – comparing certain rituals on the Afro-Virgin Islanders to those of the Afro-Curaçaoans – wrote that people would use human bones taken from graveyards in their sorcery rituals. Simpson noted that this practice reoccurred in various places around the Caribbean and in Africa. He stated that in West-Africa people threw a trail of grave around someone's living space. Also in Trinidad grave dirt would be used to harm people (1980:96). Religious paraphernalia associated with sorcery

and death were the four candles (*bela di morto*) which lit beside someone's coffin had the power to harm a chosen person (Brenneker 1966:5).

Spirits were also present in the rituals surrounding rites of passage, in which people moved from one life phase to another. At birth a child was believed to be very vulnerable, so that certain rituals had to be performed to protect it from *èzè* or *zeh* (also called *lèngè*). It was thought that this spirit could remove the skin of babies and fly through the air. During the night it would suck the child's blood. It was believed that by throwing salt on the skin of *èzè* it would be banished. According to Brenneker, these beliefs and practices occurred both in town and in the countryside. Here, the combination of Roman Catholicism and other religious practices is evident. For the newly born needed to be christened within eight days; until then it had to be protected from *èzè*. The ritual of *wak èzè* or *wak zè* was a gathering of family, neighbours and friends for nine consecutive evenings after the birth to guard the baby from this evil spirit.³⁰

This gathering was one of many securing reciprocity (Brenneker 1969:75; van Meeteren 1947). This custom appears in most Caribbean societies and is known under the name of *Soukoyant* in Dominica and French Guyana. The anthropologist Simpson, who researched this phenomenon in West-Africa and the Caribbean, considers it a syncretism of West-African and western beliefs. In West-Africa, Haiti, the Bahamas, the South Sea Islands and some parts of the southern United States, *Soukoyant* was punished by sprinkling red pepper on the discarded skin (1980:98). The *Lou-garo* mentioned by Courlander, similar to *èzè*, is also destroyed by sprinkling salt on its skin (1960:98).

Spiritual customs surrounding death were highly revered. These included several non-Catholic rituals and symbols employed by Afro-Curaçaoans. Special rituals were enacted in order to comfort the mourners and send the deceased to the afterworld. Here also the interrelationship between Catholic faith and tradition is clear. When death was imminent, a priest was called to administer the last rites. The death of a person would be signaled in advance by means of death marks. These might for example take the form of a circular bruise appearing on the body of a friend or family member of the person to die. This mark would vanish after the person's death. Other omens were taken from the natural world. For example, the appearance of a black butterfly or an owl, flying either from east to west or from west to east, a rooster crowing in the middle of the night and a dog barking at night.

In the performance of these rituals, certain people assumed leadership roles, due to their knowledge of traditional practices or their ability in other areas, for example by performing as musicians, as singers in Guene, as curers of illnesses or as 'hasidó di brua'. These were people who in regular society did not hold any social position and who were usually disparaged and dismissed but at certain times were able to perform as effective leaders (Smith 2001:140).

The Search for the Self

The previous paragraphs addressed beliefs that Afro-Curaçaoans had about the world they lived in. In their cosmology, the figure of God played a predominant role with respect to food, social relationships and destiny. In answering the question 'Where did Afro-

Curaçaoans perceive themselves to be in relation to this orientation to the world?, I would like to expand upon the concept of *pekadó* (man the sinner). This appears in many songs and proverbs and seems to conceptualize the way Afro-Curaçaoans positioned themselves in the world. It is, for example, part of the following song praising God for providing a good harvest. God, who intends the best for everyone, is opposed to humankind as a collection of sinners.

*Mira kon nos a biba na mundu
Ta nos mes ta malu na mundu
Pekadó di mundu, eeh
Ta nos mes ta malu na mundu
Mi pekadó di mundu, eh
Shon Dios tin tur kos pa nos
Mira kon Shon Dios
Tin tur kos pa nos.³¹*

*Look at how we lived in this world
It is we ourselves who are bad in this world
Sinners of the world, eah
It is we ourselves who are bad in this world
I sinner of the world, eah
Master God has everything for us
Look at how Master God
has everything for us.*

Another song containing the term *pekadó* is *Di ki manera*, perceiving mankind's well-being as determined by others with power. The lyrics 'If I behave well, the sinner finds that I am misbehaving, if I behave badly, sinners would talk scandal of me', portray a feeling of hopelessness, because in whatever way one behaves, one is still judged negatively. As this was said to be a slave song the underlying feeling of domination is evident. Different variants from different informants across the island have been collected of this song. Juliana and Brenneker collected six.³² Rosalia (1997:17) and myself collected other variants, from people born after emancipation.³³ This indicates that the song continued to be transmitted to the younger generation, who applied it to help comprehend its own situation of domination.

*Di ki manera
Di ki manera
nos ta biba n'e mundu aki,
ora mi hasi bon,
pekadó di m'a hasi malu,
ora mi hasi malu,
pekadó ta marmorami.*

*Tell me how
Tell me how
we are to live on this earth,
when I behave well,
sinners find that I am misbehaving,
when I behave badly,
sinners would talk scandal of me.*

My variant of the song resembles one collected by Brenneker and Juliana. This one was sung by an informant born in the eastern part of the island. Rosalia's variant specifies in which areas of life the domination was more profoundly felt. It relates the difficulties regarding land ownership and farming. The following stanza describes the feelings of farmers when plantation owners would roam cattle over their land and let them eat the maize stalks, as part of the *paga tera* arrangement.

Di ki manera
Di ki manera
nos ta biba n'e mundu aki,
ora mi hasi bon,
pekadó di m'a hasi malu,
ora mi hasi malu,
pekadó ta marmorami.
Di ki manera
Di ki manera
nos ta biba n'e mundu aki,
M'a sali kas
Ta kunuku mi ta bai
Yega port'e kunuku
ata baka den kunuku.³⁴

Tell me how
Tell me how
we are to live on this earth,
when I behave well,
sinners find that I am misbehaving,
when I behave badly,
sinners would talk scandal of me.
Tell me how
Tell me how
we are to live on this earth,
I left home
On the way to my farm
When I reached the gate
I saw the grazing cows.

On a different level the song emphasizes equality: those with power are sinners just like those without power. The same notion also appears in the following narrative, which reflects on death and stresses that there is no distinction between rich and poor, black and white. In this concept of life, death is life's leveller. Erquiles Martes, 77 years of age in 1976, stated in an interview with Brenneker and Juliana: 'Lamuèrtè no konosé riku, e no konosé pober. Bo por ta kon riku ku bo ta, dia yega bo tempu bo mester bai' (Death does not distinguish between rich or poor. You can be very rich, but when your time comes you have to go).³⁵ It was through their mortality that plantation owners were revealed to be human beings. Tokaai reflected on this in the following way:

E shonnan ta'a hasi manera hende ku no ta
muri. Ku no ke muri i laga e mundu aki. Mi tin
mala lenga. Pasó ora un hende bisami ku un
shon a muri, mi ta bisa: 'E no por a muri, pasó
e ta goberná, e no por muri.' Nan no ta kòrda ku
tin un Dios ku por kastigá nan.³⁶

The land owners behaved like people who
would not die. Who do not want to die and
leave this world. I have an evil tongue. Because
when they tell me that one of those people died,
I say: 'No, he could not have died, because if you
are in command like that, you cannot possibly
die.' They are not aware that there is a God who
can smite them down.

This philosophy of death as a leveller is also expressed in the following song.

Di mulena toto na uze
Ai pober
di mulena toto na uze
Pober mi ta anto
Mi mama a nengami
Ai, pober ta muri, blanku tambe
Ai, di mulena pober na uze.³⁷

Di mulena toto na uze³⁸
Oh, poor man
di mulena toto na uze
I am poor and
My mother has rejected me
Oh, poor people die, but whites also
Ai, di mulena pober na uze.³⁹

Several narratives revealed how people had misused their powers to reach their goal. They would reflect, for example, on how plantation owners could become poor before they died or experience an agonizing death. This coincides with the concept that everything happens for a reason: ‘Nada to pasa pornada’ (Nothing just happens) and ‘Kada pakiko tin su pasombra’ (Everything has its ‘because of’).⁴⁰ This notion is apparent in the following narrative, in which Virginia Meulens recalls a story told to her by her father about a wicked former slave-owner who used to punish his slaves severely. She explains his agonizing death as a punishment for the atrocities he had committed.

Mi tata a kontami. Tabatin un hòmber ku yama Chado. Esei ta bomba sutadó Muhénan na estado e ta pone e barika den buraku, anto suta nan. Ku e pidi pordon, e hòmber ta bisa: ‘Ainda bo mester di mas. Bo ta muchu vrij-postig.’ Pader sa ku mi a mira e hòmber ei su morto, dia mi tabata na San Juan. Mi a mira ku dia el a muri, tur su atras tabata dispidi, na bichi. E tabatin un kas ku tranké di piedra, tur e tranké ta na muska. Muska grandi, di e oló ku tabatin den kas. Esei ta pa pasombra el a suta e hendenan. Mal sutá. Su kastigu.⁴¹

My father told me. There was a man named Chado. He was a former slave-driver who used to beat people during slavery. Those women who were pregnant he would place them with their belly in a hole, and he would beat them. When they begged for pardon, he would say: ‘No, you need more beating. You are too forward.’ Father, you know, I saw how this man came to his end. His backside was all rotten and full of worms. His home had a fence made of stone and this was full of flies. Big flies, because of the scent which came from inside his home. That was because he used to ill-treat people. Ill-treat them very badly. That was his punishment.

Reference was often made to the attitude of acting arrogant, high (*orgullo*) or *krea idea*, as in the saying: ‘Krea idea no ta sirbi pa nada. Ora morto bini bo no por hibebe niun kaminda’ (Acting high does not help you. Because when death comes, you cannot carry it along). The following song emphasizes acting ‘high’ as a cause for the breach in communication between God and men.

*Ai Dios Weze
mira kon bon Dios a bai laga nos
Pakiko nos no por biba laminiá na mundu
manera Shon Dios a bisa nos?
Nos a buska orgullo, Weze
Mira kon nos ta ku orgullo ku otro na mundu
Ai Weze
P’esei Shon Dios a laga mundu awe.⁴²*

*Oh God Weze
look at how the good Lord has left us
Why can we not live on earth
like Master God has told us?
We looked for pride, God
Look at how we act high with each other in the
world
Oh God
That is why Master God has left the world
today.*

Despite the notion of death as the ultimate leveller, it was at death that Afro-Curaçaoans focused on respectability. Much effort was made to ensure that the proper rituals surrounded a dignified burial. Elderly people always stressed in interviews that they paid the

sitter on time, so that they would have a decent burial. These *sitters* were burial funds established by the Roman Catholic Church in the second half of the nineteenth century. They were a network of people who paid a weekly contribution which was registered in a special book (*buki di sitter*). Through this they could afford a coffin and were sometimes able to pay for coffin bearers. Some others would have their coffins placed on the rafters of their roof well before their own death. Some would have their clothes prepared in advance. People would ensure they had a proper family grave (*kèldèr*).

When, to the shame of the family, funds were insufficient, assistance was often given by others. Informants would emphasize that when someone died without a coffin ready, family members would borrow one and later return it or replace it with a new one.

P.B.: *Nan tabatin kaha wardá na kas?*

C.K.: *Na kas di mi mama mes tabatin. Ora bo ta pover bo ta traha dam, warda awa. Tabata fi'è tambe. Ora un hende ta kasi pa muri – tempunan ayá mester a dera su siguiente dia mes – si e hende ei no tin kaha, bo ta fi'è esun di bo. Si bo no yuda, Dios no ta yudabo.⁴³*

P.B.: *People used to keep their coffin in their homes?*

C.K.: *They did. At my mother's house we had one. When you are poor, you have to be prepared. Sometimes they would lend it to other people. When someone was dying – in those days you had to bury the person the day after – if they did not have a coffin, you would lend them yours. If you don't help, God will not help you.*

Although on a death in the community people felt morally obliged to help, help was not always forthcoming. In 1891 the governor sent a decree stating that an indigent⁴⁴ who had died in an institution with neither family nor the Church being able to pay for the funeral, would be buried in a simple black coffin to be transported in the hearse of the poor, accompanied by at the most six coffin bearers.⁴⁵ People who did not live socially with others also had a problem in this field (Rosalia 1989:25).

The following song was sung during the digging of graves. It is an example that the lack of communalism portrayed did not necessarily restrict itself to those who were indigent.⁴⁶ The singer is angry that although he cooperated with people in the past, he did not receive the due reciprocal help he had expected. He is left to cope alone with his difficult situation. He is unable to fulfill an act of gratitude towards his mother, as he could not give her a proper funeral. He had to carry her corpse on a piece of wood. In this song reciprocity and togetherness are emphasized as important values.

*Mi shon, mi n' biba malu
Ku ningun hende riba mundu
Ai Dios ta rib'un palu
M'a karga mort'i mi mama
Mama mama un bela na mi mama
Ai Dio' ta rib'un palu
M'a karga morto di mi mama.⁴⁷*

*My shon, I have not lived on bad terms
With anyone on earth
Oh God it is on a piece of wood that
I carried the corpse of my mother
Mama mama a candle for my mother
Oh God it is on a piece of wood that
I carried the corpse of my mother.*

Another variant:

*Mi shon, mi n' biba malu
Ku niun pushi ni kachó
Ai Dio', ta riba un palu
M'a karga mort'i mama.⁴⁸*

*I have not lived on bad
terms with neither a cat nor a dog
Oh God it is on a piece of wood that
I carried the corpse of my mother.*

The number of people present at the activities surrounding a death also indicated the status of the deceased in the community. This was likely to be based on social rather than material factors. Someone knowledgeable on matters of interest for the community, for example, had high status.

Attention and assistance would start when someone was dying. Friends, families and neighbours would gather at the bedside of a person believed to be close to death to offer help and support. They would bring along items such as coffee, tea and biscuits, and pray the rosary together, sing religious songs, tell riddles and stories about life. When the person died, this was announced by a *kachu*-player, someone making a proper death announcement by blowing the cow horn (*kachu*). By strategically announcing the death of a person in a *kachu* on a hill top a much larger group was mobilized in order to offer emotional and material support to the family of the deceased. Again the number of people who came to pay their respects was an indication of the social status of the deceased. These wakes were intercommunity rituals demonstrating solidarity with the bereaved. People would sit and talk about the deceased or tell stories.

The corpse was laid out by a *labadó di morto*, who could also be a woman. All the body openings were filled with cotton wool drenched in a liquid made of garlic lime, kamfer and chalk to prevent the escape of gas. The corpse was then displayed in the home of the deceased. The open casket was placed on a bier between four candles (*bela di morto*). Because of that the number four had special significance. The mourners walked to the coffin. Sometimes a special person (*Yoradó*) would be hired to cry at the funeral, to show that the deceased was someone who had lived well with the people in his community. People also went to extremes to organize elaborate funerals. The Catholic Church condemned this, as it went against the modest behaviour it extolled.⁴⁹

After the funeral, family and friends would return to the home of the deceased. On arriving they had to ritually 'wash their hands'. On a table a wash basin and a pitcher of water were placed, together with a crucifix, some leaves of the olive-tree, a piece of blue soap and some holy water (*awa bendita*). Everyone in turn washed their hands in the basin. Following this, during eight consecutive nights rituals were conducted, during which people prayed the rosary and sang songs. The last night, *yukan* or *ocho dia*, was the most impressive. It was led by a sacristan and the prayers were said in a mixture of Papiamentu and Latin (also showing the role of the Catholic Church). During that night, similar to other Afro-Caribbean societies such as Suriname, Nanzi stories and other tales were told.⁵⁰ This became an integral part of the *ocho dia* and is even mentioned in the proverb 'Laga kuenta pa Ocho dia', literally: Leave the stories for the eighth day or nine-night ceremony.

Trickery

Both de Certeau (1984) and Scott (1990) have approached cunning and trickery amongst subjugated people as an orientation to life and to the world. They see it as a game being played out between themselves and the dominant class. In this game, the subordinate group realizes its own forms of power while complying or appearing to comply with the dominant image. Within this compliance they can employ several techniques that conceal and aid them in gaining power. In the case of Curaçao the game element in everyday life is acknowledged in the proverb ‘Kada tambú tin su yorá, kada muhé tin su zoyá i kada bida tin su andá’: Each drum has its own rhythm, each woman has her own way of wiggling, and each life has its own way). Hendrikse-Rigaud interprets this as meaning the world is a stage on which every person plays his part (1994:114).

According to Scott, powerless people hide behind and gain strength from popular, seemingly innocent oral traditions. The game element is clearly present in aspects of life such as proverbs, folk tales, visions, gossip, rumours and humour. One example is the genre of the trickster stories in which the shrewd ‘trickster’, a cunning subordinate, gains the upper hand over a dominant figure. The common ownership and acceptance of these stories allow the subordinate to view it as an example of achievement (Scott 1990:126-82). For the Afro-Curaçaoans, Kompa Nanzi is the main figure and is regarded as a hero. Similar to other Caribbean societies, his heroic status is reflected in the fact that his name became the stories’ generic title (Rhone 2000). In this sense these stories are comparable with the Berr Rabbit stories in the United States, where scholars have argued that this figure in African-American folk tales was the symbol of the crafty, underdog enslaved or black person (Dorson 1983:38).

The theologist Armando Lampe (1988) emphasized the element of resistance within Nanzi stories and concluded that these were not just children’s stories but ways in which the Afro-Curaçaoans manifested their resistance. Nanzi, as a small spider a seemingly weak figure, is able to outsmart even the most powerful creatures, such as the tiger and the king, through his tricks and wit. In reality these stories display the wish of people to transcend their powerless position. In this sense they are not only an expression of social reality, but also a denial of it. The search for the opposite in life is also evident in the case of Chevalier, who had killed a man named Johannes. When Chevalier wanted to defend himself in court, he started by making reference to his skin colour and opposed a common conception by saying: ‘Even though I am black of colour, I will represent myself.’⁵¹

Nanzi was a figure respected for his quick-wittiness. People attributed to themselves or to a family member the creative resourcefulness of Nanzi, as the following statement reveals:

Mi tata ta manera Kompa Nanzi. Mi tata tabata un hòmber, e dianan ayá nan ta yama nan sabí.⁵² E tabata un hòmber mashá sabí, pasó ni menernan no tabata por kuné. Ni pastornan no tabata por kuné. E tabata manera Kompa Nanzi.⁵³

My father is like Kompa Nanzi. My father was a man, in those days they would call them intelligent. He was a very intelligent man, because not even the district master knew how to deal with him. Not even the priests knew how to deal with him. He was like Kompa Nanzi.

Several proverbs emanating from inter-human relationships contain the same underlying philosophy as the Nanzi stories. For example:

- *Si bo bai traha hende bibu bo ta bira nan katibu.* ‘If you work with living people you will become their slave’ (Hendrikse-Rigaud 1994:26).
- *Sinti di hende ta kashi di piká.* ‘Human beings sooner think badly than well’ (Hendrikse-Rigaud 1994:108).
- *Palabrua di: pa motibu di hende bibu mi ta skonde mi kara.* ‘The owl said, because of living people, I have to hide my face’ (Hendrikse-Rigaud 1994:294).
- *Sloke di: maishi chiki na mondi tempu di sekura, ta hende bibu mes a pon’e.* ‘The bird sloke (Colinus cristatus)⁵⁴ said: when you find millet in the wood in the dry period, it is because living people have placed it there’ (Hendrikse-Rigaud 1994:295).
- *Guengu di: pa librami di hende bibu mi a bai drumi na lagun.* ‘The fish Guengu said: in order to free myself from the living people I went to sleep in the lagoon’ (Hendrikse-Rigaud 1994:303).
- *Söldachi di: hende bibu a ponemi karga mi kas riba lomba.* ‘The hermit crab said: it is living people who made me carry my home on my back’ (Hendrikse-Rigaud 1994:294).
- *Hende bibu ta sentebibu.* ‘Living people are just as bitter as aloe’ (Hendrikse-Rigaud 1994:218).
- *Zumbi di Plánmulina di: si hende bibu no tabata mal hende, guiotin di chumbu lo a pasa. Zumbi di Makaya di: hende bibu ta mal hende, sino plaka falsu lo a pasa na Kòrsou.* ‘The Plánmulina ghost said: if living people were not bad, the lead guiotin coin would have been accepted as current money. The Makaya ghost said: if living people were not bad, counterfeit would have been accepted as genuine money on Curaçao’ (Hendrikse-Rigaud 1994:278).

These eight proverbs refer to mankind in a negative way: people are not to be trusted. They have the power to gossip, to curse, to lie and to cheat. These sayings reaffirm what was said in the previous examples, showing that in post-emancipation society Afro-Curaçaoan daily life was not characterized only by harmony and solidarity. There was also distrust and a lack of solidarity among people, particularly in difficult situations. The scholars Valdemar Marcha and Paul Verweel refer to this as the culture of fear, which is paradoxical in nature and leads to complicated social relationships (2003:61-2).

This paradoxical attitude is demonstrated in the ways people regarded trickery, which was also ambivalent. On the one hand there was condemnation, but on the other hand there was also respect for someone who was able to trick those with power. When informants stressed that a certain person was cunning, this was always accompanied by laughter as a form of consent. As previously stated, the element of trickery was also present in other stories than those about Nanzi. In the stories told during the ocho dia ceremony the witty person succeeds in overcoming all challenges. In his book *Echa cuenta* (1970) Juliana published several of these stories, which also contain elements of trickery.

Also in other aspects of everyday life people were respected for their cunning. An example of this is the persistence of the Guene language, which allowed people to conceal their criticisms of those with power. This language was developed as a medium of communica-

tion among the enslaved and was used until the twentieth century (Martinus 1997). It turned out that on some plantations the inhabitants were prohibited from singing in Guene, as the owners suspected that they were singing about them.⁵⁵ This was also related to Brenneker in an interview with Teodoor Coco, born in 1885, who recalled a particular event on the plantation of San Juan, where someone sang in Guene about a cow on Bonaire that could not catch him ('Baka di Boneiru, ma e baka no por kowemi?'). The other workers informed the owner of the plantation that the person was singing about him and he was subsequently punished.⁵⁶ Another example was given by an informant born in 1907, who related how the labourers of the phosphate industry in the eastern part of the island used to sing about their supervisors in Guene, but lied about the songs' content to their overseers⁵⁷.

Conclusion

The lives of Afro-Curaçaoans were hard due to poverty and the boundaries set by the white elite, the State and the Roman Catholic Church. I have looked at how Afro-Curaçaoans created beliefs and meanings which became apparent and were expressed in the concept 'tambú di bida'.

What stands out is that in their daily struggle to survive they developed numerous coping methods generated through their outlook on life. This is clearly manifested in the ability to create these methods on an economic, a social and also on a spiritual level. People tried to find an outlet through singing, dancing and story-telling, thus making life more bearable. It was in this area that women, especially the female tambú singers, contravened what was deemed respectable behaviour, showing assertiveness and courage in their daily life.

On this level they combined their traditional beliefs with the vision of the world they lived in. The interplay of Catholic saints with good and bad spirits was an example of this. This was also evident in the value placed on reciprocal help and social assistance. Often people would unite and perform tasks together. This spirit of interdependence and solidarity was an important survival strategy and clearly revealed itself in many areas of life, not only in economic activities such as harvesting, but also in the case of illness and death. Most of these actions were motivated by spiritual ideas of what was considered good in social relationships. In their daily lives people practiced their religiosity and expressed their creativity within the parameters set by the institutions of power. At the same time, many sayings refer to the disappointment about unfulfilled expectations of reciprocity among peers. This might indicate that the decision to reciprocate and cooperate depended on much more than solely morality and that socio-economic conditions as well as self-interest may also need to be taken into consideration.

Notes

- 1 Lampe 1988; Streefkerk 1999, 2003.
- 2 Interview Felix Martina (born 21-2-1894), Brenneker/Juliana, 28-3-1978 (T 62, Fundashon Biblioteka Públiko Kòrsou).
- 3 'Tambú' refers to the celebration, to the music performed during this event and to the corresponding dance. If no drum was available, people would improvise using a box, for example, to beat the rhythm. See NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Rol van Strafzaken 1878, Procesverbaal no. 24 for a description of how people sang while someone beat the rhythm on a box.
- 4 Sometimes a *banderita* was used to this end: a short verse would be composed and written on a small flag. Its lyrical content would express a sly dig at a person (Zikinzá-collection, T 247, NatAr). People would buy a banderita with a text that appealed to their feelings. These texts were often used for the tambú. The use of a banderita implies a certain degree of literacy, so that it probably stems from the period when an increasing number of people could read and write. Being able to thus vent one's opinion on events and on people reveals a kind of openness and courage. However, since this was done by using innuendo's and metaphors it is also clear that too direct an approach would meet with negative consequences. At the end of the year district masters were extra vigilant. They would report whether the Christmas festivities had been conducted peacefully.
- 5 The priest Euwens (1906) observed that due to members of the white class participating in these scandalous celebrations, they could not be eradicated.
- 6 Rosalia (1997:139). According to Rosalia, the Afro-Curaçaoans sneeringly labelled this celebration *tambú di señorita*, to distinguish it from the real tambú.
- 7 Juliana (1981:19) mentions that in the 1930s this type of request was first heard.
- 8 Interview Wam Sem (1888), Brenneker/Juliana, 1959 (Zikinzá-collection, T 380 NatAr); Interview Hose Melano (1905), Brenneker/Juliana, 1959 (Zikinzá-collection, T 789 NatAr).
Shon Grandi mes a duna The big master has given
El a duna awe He has given today
- 9 Interview Victor Bartolomeo (born 1935), Allen/La Croes, 8-3-2000 (personal collection).
- 10 *Amigoe*, 1-5-1943.
- 11 Interview Victor Bartolomeo (born 1935), Allen/La Croes, 8-3-2000 (personal collection); see also Zikinzá-collection, T 380 and T 789 (NatAr).
- 12 Interview Mario and Chilin Martes (8-11-1916), Brenneker/Juliana, 11-4-1984 (Zikinzá-collection, T 108 and T 109, NatAr).
- 13 Zikinzá-collection, T 456, NatAr.
- 14 Interview Augustin Bartolomeo (born 1889), Brenneker/Juliana, February 1982 (T 80, Fundashon Biblioteka Públiko Kòrsou).
- 15 Interview Carlitu Martina (born 1905), Brenneker/Juliana, 26-4-1984 (T 101, Fundashon Biblioteka Públiko Kòrsou).
- 16 Interview Eduardo Tokaai (born 1899), Allen, 12-9-1984 (NatAr).
- 17 Kerstgeschenk 1883:166.
- 18 See, for example, the information about the house of Eliza, which burned down after a candle fell from an altar in her home (NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken, Journalen 2e en 3e district, inv. no. 177, 4-3-1922/31).
- 19 It was said that he had fathered a child and was therefore closer to humans.
- 20 Interview Virginia Blanken (born 24-8-1901), Brenneker/Juliana, 5-6-1973 (T 32, Fundashon Biblioteka Públiko Kòrsou).
- 21 The term 'zumbi' apparently derived from the word 'zombi' (Congo) and refers to the spirits of the deceased. Shon Pa (born 1899), interviewed by Juliana and Brenneker, states that a 'zumbi' is the soul of an evil person who after death did not get a rest. A 'zumbi' can take the form of a dog, duck, hen or iguana. They are found in the woods and like to live under old trees. A spirit, in contrast, can be a good force.

- 22 'Obeah' is a term used in the English-speaking Caribbean and refers to folk magic, sorcery and religious practices.
- 23 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Rol van Strafzaken 14-5-1872, Procesverbaal no. 19.
- 24 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 2e en 3e district, 1905-1919, inv. no. 167, 29-9-1911/263.
- 25 NatAr, Archief van het gouvernement, Journalen 2e en 3e district, 1906-1935, inv. no. 174, 11-5-1911, 5-6-1911.
- 26 NatAr, idem, 3-5-1911.
- 27 *La Union*, 22-7-1896.
- 28 Joceline Clemencia approached the life of Katalina from a feministic point of view and explains why someone like Katalina was condemned in society by the clergy and their followers (1996:83-91). Katalina owned cattle and sold homemade bread, biscuits, clothes and the produce of her land. She also sold liquor to the workers at the mine company of Santa Barbara and organized parties specifically for rich people living in town (1996:83-4). The other woman owned a shop and rented different houses.
- 29 To the amazement of many, despite his handicap Damasio Hooi (Tomas Kokoti) was able to work and dance (Zikinzá-collection, T 1103, NatAr). Courlander 1960:20, 84.
- 30 Zikinzá-collection, T 758, NatAr. They would also sing the following song (T 705), which the informant Marvelita Comenencia (born 1903, living in Kanga, central Curaçao) called *kantika di 8 dia di boutismo* (the song after eight days of baptism).
- | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>Mi lèngè leidó</i> | <i>My lèngè leidó</i> |
| <i>Mi lèngè tei den (2x)</i> | <i>My lèngè is there</i> |
| <i>Mi lèngè leidó</i> | <i>My lèngè leidó</i> |
| <i>Zè tei den</i> | <i>Zè is in there</i> |
| <i>Mi lèngè leidó.</i> | <i>My lèngè leidó.</i> |
- 31 Interview Gerardo Rosario (born 1877), Brenneker/Juliana, 1958 (Zikinzá-collection, T 45, NatAr).
- 32 Sung by Martili Pieters (born 1900, Banda Bou, T 11 and T 13); Martili Pieters in Guene (T 14); Francisco Conquet (born 1882, Veeris, T 654); Janchi Doran (born 1886, Wacawa, T 813); Damasio Hooi (born 1887, Dokterstuin, T 1409). Zikinzá-collection, NatAr.
- 33 Interview Nicolaas Petrona (born 1898), Allen, 20-5-1989 (NatAr).
- 34 Rosalia 1997:17.
- 35 Interview Erquiles Martes (born 1899), Brenneker/Juliana, 7-10-1976 (T 44 and T 45, Fundashon Biblioteka Públiko Kòrsou).
- 36 Interview Eduardo Tokaai (born 1899), Allen, 12-9-1984 (NatAr).
- 37 Interview Joos Marta (born 1885, Wacawa), Brenneker/Juliana, 1959 (Zikinzá-collection, T 815, NatAr).
- 38 Unable to translate.
- 39 Unable to translate.
- 40 Compare the Akan proverbs 'Biribiara nsi kwa' (Nothing just happens) and 'Biribirara won e se nti' (Everything has its 'because of') (Gyekye 1987:82).
- 41 Story told by Virginia Meulens (born 1869; Zikinzá-collection, T 437, NatAr).
- 42 Song sung by Gerardo Rosario (born 1877), living in Banda Riba (Zikinzá-collection, T 759 and T 760, NatAr).
- 43 Interview Clementine Kirindingo (born 25-10-1878), Brenneker/Juliana, 27-9-1977 (T 54, Fundashon Biblioteka Públiko Kòrsou).
- 44 Indigents were former slaves who received money from the government because they were unable to work.
- 45 NA, Ministerie van Koloniën, 1850-1900, inv. no. 6788, 25-4-1891/234.
- 46 Most of these songs were called *kantika di piki* and were sung during digging activities. During the harvest celebration several would be transformed by changing the tune or the rhythm to

- accommodate the procession (Rosalia 1989). 'Work songs encourage me to work', said an informant who considered himself a good lead-singer as he did not sing *wadjo*, a term referring to the singing of someone who cannot lead the rhythm of the song to correspond with the work activity. Those digging the holes with the hoe or with a pickaxe also had to know how to keep the rhythm or else they would be sent to do other work (Interview Nicolaas Petrona (born 1898), Allen, 20-5-1989 (NatAr).
- 47 Interview Andres Didi Sluis (born 1904), Allen/Ernest Gaari, 3-4-1984 (NatAr). See also song sung by Gerardo Rosario (born 1877; Zikinzá-collection, T 315, NatAr).
- 48 Interview Andres Didi Sluis (born 1904), Allen/Ernest Gaari, 29-3-1984 (NatAr).
- 49 *La Cruz*, 28-4-1915.
- 50 Or people would play a game called *speelchi*. This was played after twelve o'clock on the ninth day and revolved around a cat trying to catch a mouse (Zikinzá-collection, T 530, NatAr).
- 51 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Rol van Strafzaken 1878, Procesverbaal no. 24.
- 52 The term 'sabi' was used for different purposes, for example to refer to people with knowledge of medicinal herbs and to people who knew how to solve social conflicts.
- 53 Interview Chilin Martes (born 8-11-1916), Brenneker/Juliana, 22-9-1983 (T 85, Fundashon Biblioteka Públiko Kòrsou).
- 54 Crested bobwhite.
- 55 Interview Victor Bartolomeo (born 1935), Allen/La Croes, 1-5-2000 (personal collection).
- 56 Interview Teodoor Coco (born 1886), Brenneker/Juliana, 1959 (Zikinzá-collection, T 648, NatAr).
- 57 Interview Simon Bonifacio (born 1907), Allen, 9-5-1989 and 16-5-1989 (NatAr).

CHAPTER X

Conclusion: Survival and Cultural Complexity

This study concerns the dynamics of Afro-Curaçaoan social life from 1863 until 1917. It explores especially material, family and religious life in the post-emancipation period. The historiography of Curaçao in the period between the formal abolition of slavery and the start of the industrialization process at the beginning of the twentieth century is meagre. In addressing this period and these themes, this study is in line with the tendency in Caribbean historiography to look at the ways in which the formerly enslaved developed their culture and gave meaning to their lives within the limited socio-economic possibilities available to them in the post-emancipation period.

In order to give an in-depth view of Afro-Curaçaoan life, the use of oral history has been central in this study. The written historical sources provide only one side of the past. These sources give little insight into how Afro-Curaçaoans used their culture to navigate their lives through continual forms of control. By using oral histories and interviews, I have tried to draw out long forgotten or hidden information about this group. The speakers themselves expose, in their own words, how diverse and complex their social reality was. The combination of different types of written and oral data enables us to better understand the complexity of the cultural dynamics among the Afro-Curaçaoan population.

In addition these data from oral history and tradition provide a particular insight into the lives of women, who have been doubly silenced in Curaçaoan historiography. Principally in proverbs, but in songs and stories as well, women displayed a consciousness of their lives, and expressed an awareness of the complexities imposed by race, class and gender-specific barriers. Their concerns included their partnerships with men, their feelings of happiness and disappointment with their children, their attitudes towards their parents and the nature of their relationships with other women.

When using oral data, one has to overcome the fact that oral sources are distinct from other types of historical primary material because of their continued reliance on memory. Oral testimonies are not contemporary with the events and issues related, and their recordings are mostly carried out long after the events have occurred. These data were therefore used with much caution as indicators of how Afro-Curaçaoans continually reassessed and valorized events and issues that occurred in their daily lives or in those of their ancestors. Mostly such information was encoded and conveyed values and principles specific to their culture.

Oral histories make quite clear the role of cultural meanings in shaping post-emancipation Afro-Curaçaoan cultural identities. This emic approach offers an alternative

perspective for examining the history of Afro-Curaçaoans by looking at the ways people symbolized and structured their understanding of life. Written sources on the daily life of people were used for cross-checking the oral sources. Sometimes as little as a sentence in the written documents gave a further lead to what people had related in their narratives. The combination of different types of written and oral data enabled me to better understand the complexity of the cultural dynamics among the Afro-Curaçaoan group taking place after emancipation.

This study deals with the close relationship between culture and power - especially the way in which this becomes manifest in the daily lives of subjugated people. The significance of the link between power and culture resounds in the particular social, political and racial matrix that shaped Afro-Curaçaoan life both in the pre- and post-emancipation periods. Even though my study explores power relations and how these were experienced by marginalized people, I have tried to go beyond the bipolarity of resistance and domination prevalent in older resistance theories. Instead, I attempt to demonstrate that subjugated people in their daily lives do much more than merely resist and oppose external social forces.

I suggest that post-emancipation daily life for Afro-Curaçaoans was not one of continuous tension and conflict. Social life also encompassed integration, social cohesion, solidarity and cooperation, as the former enslaved people negotiated within and outside of their social groups, struggling to survive within the constraints of the existing asymmetric power relations. The cultural dynamics and identities that evolved in and from these social interactions were complex, multidimensional in scope, and fluid.

The seeds for the cultural complexity which characterized post-emancipation social life were sown during slavery. The way Afro-Curaçaoans created and developed their social life after freedom in 1863 was rooted in the previous period of enslavement. The formal abolition of slavery did not mean an entirely new life for those who had received their freedom. While they faced new challenges, their economic and social lives continued to be marked by the legacies of the past.

Curaçao did not correspond with the conventional definition of a slave society where slavery was ubiquitous and central to the functioning of the economy. The island was not a monoculture of large-scale slave plantations determining the social life of an overwhelming majority of enslaved people. The proportion of freedpeople was relatively large and always growing. Rather than plantation agriculture, commerce was a distinguishing feature of the insular economy.

During the early phases of the transatlantic slave trade, Curaçao was a major transit port for enslaved Africans brought in Dutch ships destined to be sold again to mainland Spanish colonies. In that sense Curaçao holds a unique position in Caribbean slave societies. Until the beginning of the eighteenth century, a significant part of the enslaved population was comprised of people only temporarily living on the island, waiting to be deported to the Spanish Main. The continuous influx of enslaved Africans may have shaped a diasporic culture among the enslaved Afro-Curaçaoans who remained informed of the African dynamics of the transatlantic trafficking in human beings.

The factors which influenced the deportation of some slaves to the mainland and the retention of others have not yet been satisfactorily studied. Slave-owners from the Spanish

Main and the island's commercial elite expressed preferences for African captives from specific ethnic groups and areas, which must have influenced the ethnic constellation of the group remaining on the island. Some researchers suggest a local preference for keeping people from Luango (Angola) on the island, as many of these could act as interpreters between the Europeans and the newly imported enslaved people. This implicates that specifically these Luango slaves were early creolizers. The term 'Luango' is recurring in the memories of Afro-Curaçaoan descendants through stories, songs and proverbs as an example of African origin as well. In the course of slavery, 'Luango' became a common mark of distinction between the African-born and creole enslaved people.

Environmental conditions deeply affected Curaçaoan society. Insufficient rainfall rendered it almost unviable for plantation agriculture. Subsistence farming was dominant and of concern for all members of society. This had a direct impact on the form of enslavement, the economic viability of the plantations, the type of labour demands and the nature of social relationships. On most plantations the enslaved combined different types of work.

Except for a few plantations in the western part of the island, most Curaçaoan plantations were small in size. This impacted on the nature of relationships both within and outside the social group. A noticeable characteristic resulting from the economic fragility of most plantations was that slave-owners often allowed their enslaved workers significant geographical mobility. Men were hired out to work in town as artisans, women as domestic servants. A high number of enslaved people thus worked and lived in an urban setting, with a culture markedly different from that in the countryside. Craftsmen in particular were able to improve their economic conditions and to further develop their skills. They formed a group much sought after both on the island and abroad. Enslaved males would also be hired out to work as seamen in order to provide a monetary income for their owners. Even though there was significant maritime marronage, most of these enslaved sailors kept returning to the island, perhaps, as Price states, because of family ties.

One of the distinguishing features of slavery on Curaçao was the fact that the number of manumitted people, both black and of mixed race, grew considerably due to frequent manumissions. Some of these were formerly enslaved people who themselves or their families had been able to buy their freedom. Others were old and handicapped people whose owners simply disposed of them as economic liabilities: they gained their freedom when their owners could or would no longer continue feeding them. This unhappy group did not enjoy a smooth transformation from enslavement to freedom and was left to fend for itself. By entering freedom under the worst social conditions, these disadvantaged former slaves continued to be socially marginalized.

Frequent miscegenation led to a significant number of people of mixed race in society. Their roots lay with the children from unions between white slave-owners and black enslaved women. With some frequency, the white fathers gave their children their freedom. The relationship between these masters and their coloured mistresses and offspring was marked by social ties that seemed less racially polarized and to a certain extent even harmonious. Certainly, in this multiracial society, the group of mixed origins enjoyed a privileged status above the black population.

The social structure was therefore characterized by increasing complexity, both within and outside the sphere of the plantation. By the mid-nineteenth century, the Afro-

Curaçaoan population had steadily grown and had achieved significant diversity in terms of skin colour, class, and probably culture.

After emancipation, the Roman Catholic Church reinforced its involvement with the Afro-Curaçaoan population, leaving a strong mark on its cultural identity. The Church introduced educational activities, such as instruction in reading and writing, and tried to transform Afro-Curaçaoan culture by instilling its moral views on right and wrong in beliefs and everyday practices. The Church attempted to eradicate cultural conventions and practices it considered heathenish remnants of an African past.

At emancipation, society was heavily segmented along socio-economic and corresponding racial and colour lines. Afro-Curaçaoans who during the pre-emancipation period had been able to acquire their freedom as well as material resources, primarily land, could continue to live in fairly reasonable conditions. The majority instead - both those who had only become free on 1 July 1863 and those already freed before that date but without many resources - remained socially marginalized.

Basically as a rule, there were insufficient employment opportunities. The worrying question posited at the time of emancipation was not so much whether the freed would be willing to work, but rather whether there would be sufficient work for them to do in the first place. At the same time, the remaining plantation owners demanded a disciplined labour force ready to perform disciplined work when occasionally their labour was needed. This request went against the freedpeople's increasing desire for more mobility and autonomy. Many overcame their dependency and insecurity by looking for work outside of the plantations, either as urban workers or as independent peasants in the countryside. Clearly the former masters and their former slaves did not see eye to eye as to the meaning of freedom. This led to recurring clashes.

In the first decades after emancipation, the plantation owners continued their mechanisms of control. They successfully imposed the 'paga tera system' on those former slaves who continued to live on their plantations. This system was already developing in the pre-emancipation period as a means of controlling manumitted slaves. The paga tera system created a group of men and women living in a situation of semi-serfdom, being dependent for work and living space on their former slave-owners.

These people living under the paga tera system had very few rights. Their dependency was exposed in accusatory oral histories. Many considered the paga tera as a brutal continuation of the planters' domination of their lives. Adults, and their children and even their grandchildren, were trapped in the spiral of domination, so memory tells.

One way of becoming autonomous and to evade the power of the plantation owners was to acquire a piece of land of one's own through the government. In the first decades after abolition this was not easy, as the amount of government land was limited and as in addition the government tended to side with the plantation owners against the petitioners. In each case, the individual petitioner's personality had to be assessed. Government officials made their decision based on a character reference usually given by the owner of the plantation on which the applicant had lived. This reference was more than likely to meet his self-interest.

Often the only remaining option was to squat on the meagre sabana, pieces of land over which plantation owners assumed the privilege of grazing their animals. The squatting of the sabana led to clashes between plantation owners and inhabitants over its tenure. This ranged from direct opposition to the rules and regulations laid down to favour those in power to more covert ways of resistance.

Resistance had a cultural dimension, as in the celebrating of tambú dancing and singing on this squatted land, much to the disgust of the plantation owners. In doing so, these Afro-Curaçaoan squatters also dragged along those who lived nearby under the paga tera system, who were explicitly forbidden to engage in such expressions. Tambú was believed to have a demoralizing effect.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the land policy of the government started to give out more land to the poor. Even though it still sought advice regarding the personal characters of the petitioners from the plantation owners, the government now also relied on advice given by its own district masters. From this same period we have indications that some petitioners at least would not accept a negative decision and would continue to challenge this through legal procedures.

Once these peasants gained access to land, they used it for mixed-farming. Millet was the prime subsistence produce for local consumption. Previously, during slavery, they had cultivated millet on the small pieces of land on the plantation grounds - kunuku - allotted to them for subsistence farming. Millet was a domesticated agricultural product originating from Africa. The mainstay of subsistence agriculture was thus based on a traditional knowledge system transferred from Africa and adapted to the new conditions. This expertise became part of the indigenous practice of survival applied on the plantations as well as in their own gardens. In addition, peasants kept animals such as goats, domesticated pigs and chickens. The more successful ones would be able to use a donkey for transporting goods from the countryside to town and vice versa.

Increasingly Afro-Curaçaoans attempted to leave the poverty of the countryside to settle in the town of Willemstad, hoping to find better opportunities. This trend was opposed by the plantation owners who feared a shortage of labour. The new arrivals were soon met with the harsh realities of town life. There was some demand for labour in trade, the harbour and in craftwork. Nevertheless, in times of little demand for such labour, having a piece of land in the countryside could be crucial.

Divergent perceptions of life style developed: urban life came to be identified with cunningness, bravery and civilized behaviour, while rural identity was associated with docility, submissiveness and stupidity as well as uncivilized behaviour. Urban values were more associated with an increasingly sought alternative among Afro-Curaçaoans, this being labour migration. As elsewhere in the Caribbean, migration became a coping strategy and indeed a way of life of many men. Hundreds of Afro-Curaçaoan males emigrated to several countries in Latin America and the Caribbean in the later nineteenth century.

In 1917 the largest labour migration took place, to the sugar fields of Cuba. Curaçao then stood at the threshold of a transition from a pre industrial society to an industrial one. For some migration was successful, in the sense that they returned with funds and were able to buy land and other properties. The largest group, however, returned as socially destitute as they had left.

These migrations, both within the island and outside of it, played an important role in the further development of Afro-Curaçaoan culture. Particularly intra-regional migration led to a cross-fertilization of local cultures with other Caribbean cultures. This manifested itself in the areas of religion, music and dance. For example, returnees from Cuba took with them musical instruments such as the guitar, *bongos*, *tres* and the *marimbula*. These returnees would transmit their cultural experiences to their home culture. Some formed musical groups, known as *banda di bongo* (bongo bands), which became very popular on Curaçao and contributed to the spread of the large variety of Cuban music on the island, such as the *son*, *guanguanco*, *rumba* and *mambo*. Many of these songs and rhythms were subsequently sung and composed in the local language, Papiamentu.

The Roman Catholic Church retained its position as a major cultural institution in the life of Afro-Curaçaoans. For the Church, the abolition of slavery meant less interference by former slave-owners and therefore more room for what it believed to be the moral uplifting of the lower classes. The clergy focused on 'civilizing' their values, beliefs and norms in all areas of life.

This civilizing mission focused on social aspects of life neglected by the other institutions of power, the colonial State and the socio-economic elites. The clergy would denounce the poor living conditions of the Afro-Curaçaoans and where necessary and possible provided relief help. The Church maintained a firm line in what it considered correct and moral behaviour, both through preaching and formal education among the younger generation. It tried to redefine every stage of the life cycle, from the day someone was born until he died. The clergy imposed their authority in rituals after birth, in initiation into manhood and womanhood, in marriage, last rites and burials.

Of course, the Church rejected all traces of religious belief which deviated from Catholicism. Life styles identified as heathenish were strongly condemned. The Church tried to penetrate more deeply than the colonial State into the private, domestic and social lives of its flock. Afro-Curaçaoans responded to this civilizing drive in sometimes paradoxical ways. Apart from the specific spiritual meanings, abiding by the value system of the Church provided advantages both in an economical and a social sense.

For example, some poor people who were close to the priests would be able to acquire a piece of land through the mediation of the Church. Others were able to ascend hierarchically through Catholic education and subsequently in work. In their daily lives they obeyed the norms set by the Church. Their behaviour conformed to the codes of 'respectability'. At the same time, Afro-Curaçaoan culture developed through the creative re-appropriation of Catholic values, norms and practices and their reinterpretation according to local traditional practices and values.

A graphic example of this paradoxical appropriation was the idealization of the ideal of *biba un bida drechi* (living a respectable life). This concept was introduced by the Church to encourage couples of opposite sex to institutionalize their relationship in a monogamous and stable marriage. While this became an accepted norm of respectability, at the same time there remained wide acceptance of male relationships outside of this idealized code.

The codes imposed by the Church were at once formally accepted but in actual practice challenged. Another striking example is the *seú* ceremony celebrated after the millet harvest in March and April. The *seú* was accepted by the Roman Catholic Church and the elites, who considered it a harmless expression of gratitude to God for having received a good harvest. But these celebrations also contained elements of opposition and negotiation. Thus the *seú* celebrations started with indeed seemingly harmless work songs, but ended with the ‘vulgar’ and ‘heathenish’ *tambú*, a dance abhorred by both Church and the colonial State.

In this *seú*, several contradictory values were acted out. Thus the acts of *toro manzinga* and *toro mansebo* performed during this celebration expressed male identity and masculinity. Yet another example of this reinterpretation of cultural elements is the custom of *wak èzè* practiced during the eight days before a baby was baptized in Church. Other examples refer to the rituals surrounding death and burial, in which Roman Catholic rituals were combined with African derived ones. Catholic Saints such as *San Antoni*, *San Juan* and *San Pedro* were venerated in quite different ways from those dictated by the Catholic faith. Afro-Curaçaoan veneration included drumming, dancing and non-Catholic symbolisms.

As I have tried to demonstrate in the preceding Chapters, the life of most Afro-Curaçaoans was characterized by a continuous struggle for survival. Struggles for land, for economic survival and for security were coupled to a drive to achieve dignity and to combine values imposed by the ‘white’ institutions with cultural practices, some of which originated in Africa and others developed in a long period of slavery. In all of this, the internal differentiation among the Afro-Curaçaoan majority increased along the dimensions of class, ethnicity, gender, generation and area of domicile.

Cultural complexity characterizes the lives of Afro-Curaçaoans. While they built surviving mechanisms in all spheres of life, they also developed values relating to mutual help, social assistance and reciprocity. This spirit of interdependence and solidarity manifested itself in many areas of life, such as in shared labour, during harvest time, at child birth, on the building of a home, during illness and on death, but also in a range of recreational activities. However, there is little reason to assume that a spirit of solidarity always reigned supreme. Equally there is no ground to make up an idealized image of a valiant people constantly defying the institutions of power. Alongside and perhaps more clearly than resistance, accommodation held sway.

The leading question of this thesis was ‘*What role did the State, the former slave-owners and the Roman Catholic Church play in the lives of Afro-Curaçaoans in the post-emancipation era, in what ways did Afro-Curaçaoans shape their own material, social and spiritual lives, either within, outside or in opposition to the constraints of these institutions?*’

I have attempted to demonstrate throughout this thesis that an immense asymmetry in power relations characterized Curaçaoan society. The vast African-origins majority of the population had only limited access to the island’s natural resources monopolized by the white elites both during and after slavery. Even after emancipation, it took the colonial State decades to develop a land policy which at least started to take the interests of the

Afro-Curaçaoan population seriously. The same can be observed of the provision and regulation of work.

The Roman Catholic Church had its own agenda of 'civilization'. The imbuing of the former slave population with Catholicism was envisioned as a package including the enforcing (sometimes by means of corporal punishment) of a 'western' work ethic, law obedience, disciplined kinship patterns characterized by the nuclear family, and the extinction of what was considered African 'heathenish' culture.

While the great majority of the formerly enslaved population eventually became Catholic, the wider 'package' became anything but universal. The popular culture which evolved in the post-emancipation period was marked by a mixture of resistance to the pressures of the 'white world' as well as the adoption of local variations of the models imposed by the State and particularly the Church. In the process, the Afro-Curaçaoan population became gradually more diverse within itself, along the lines of class, colour, gender and generation.

Note

- 1 Bongos: two small drums joined by a piece of wood, held on the lap. One plays with the finger and the palm of the hand. Tres: three-stringed guitar, typical of Cuba, mainly used in *son* and *punto guajiro*. *Marimbula*: instrument used by *son* groups.

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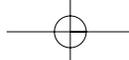
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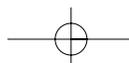
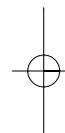
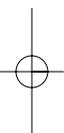
APPENDIX I

Overview of material collected by Brenneker and Juliana

Category	Subcategory
Songs	Work songs
	Religious songs
	Ceremonial songs
	Satirical songs
	Love songs
	Lullabies
	School songs
	Story songs
	Game songs
	Selling songs
	Narratives
Tricksters	
Personal stories	
Etiological tales (explaining why things are the way they are)	
Reminiscences	
Religious stories	
Lists	Place-names
	Personal names (epithets)
	Nicknames
	Plant names
	Artifact names
	Fish names
	Games (ring games)
Folk beliefs and customs	Conception, pregnancy, birth and infancy, twins, baptism
	Dating, love, courtship and marriage
	Diseases, healing and remedies
	Ceremonial customs
	Agriculture
	Dying, death and funeral arrangements
	Nature, flora and fauna
Economics	



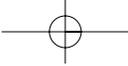
Folk sayings, rhymes and proverbs	Children's rhymes, fingerplay sayings Play rhymes Game rhymes Riddles Peddler cries Euphemisms
Folk material	Several artifacts (domestic, religious, musical)



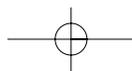
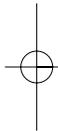
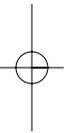
APPENDIX II

Overview of types of songs

Category	Type and translation
Work songs	Kantika di bati ku tati (when pounding cactus with the mortar called 'tati')
	Kantika di bati maishi den pilon (when pounding millet in a mortar made of a tree-trunk)
	Kantika di mula maishi (when grinding millet)
	Kantika di bua kanoa (when rowing the fishing boat)
	Kantika di hala kanoa (when beaching the fishing boat)
	Kantika di karga hamaka (when carrying a sick person in a hammock)
	Kantika di koba pos (when digging a well)
	Kantika di mukel (when using a sledge-hammer)
	Kantika di kore ficho (when taking coal to shore to be loaded onto the boats)
	Kantika di dèmpel (when filling holes)
	Kantika di rema ponchi (when carrying people on small boats across the harbour)
Religious songs	Kantika di San Antoni (songs for Saint Anthony)
	Kantika di San Wan (songs for Saint John)
Ceremonial songs	Kantika di seú (for the harvest festival)
	Kantika di bati huda (for the procession in which people would beat a doll in the figure of the apostle Judas who betrayed Jezus)
	Kantika di chiwewe (for the novena for Holy Mary)
	Kantika di djasabra (Saturday song)
	Kantika di ocho dia (for the eight-nights ceremony upon someone's death)
	or Kantika di dum ve (for the eight-nights ceremony upon someone's death)
Satirical songs	Kantika di Zè (for the eight days in which a child is protected against Zè)
	Tambú
	Kantika di aña nobo (for the new year)
	Kantika di puña (satire)
Lullabies	Kantika di pleizi (for enjoyment)
	Kantika pa hasi yu drumi
School songs	Kantika di skol
Story songs	Kantika di storia
Game songs	Kantika di mucha (for children)
	Kantika di hunga palu (for stick dance)



Wega di spelchi (for games)
Samanakitoki (for stick dance)



APPENDIX III

Observations on demographic figures, 1863-1917

Table 1. Population and Migration by Sex, Curacao 1863-1917

Year	<i>Population</i>			<i>Net migration</i>			<i>Sex ratio</i>
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
1863	8747	10397	19144	-118	60	-58	0.84
1864	8852	10527	19379	36	269	305	0.84
1865	8989	10875	19864	48	226	274	0.83
1866	9022	11263	20285	44	-28	16	0.80
1867	9301	11401	20702	-165	-38	-203	0.82
1868	9335	11509	20844	-245	-640	-885	0.81
1869	9183	10946	20129	521	561	1082	0.84
1870	9662	11427	21189	-83	81	-2	0.85
1871	9692	11627	21319	-72	65	-7	0.83
1872	9909	11991	21900	-234	75	-159	0.83
1873	10072	12273	22345	-219	181	-38	0.82
1874	10085	12628	22713	465	350	815	0.80
1875	10763	13209	23972	-394	-224	-618	0.81
1876	10622	13168	23790	-389	-328	-717	0.81
1877	10517	13100	23617	106	114	220	0.80
1878	10704	13273	23977	-219	-3	-222	0.81
1879	10622	13366	23988	-210	-12	-222	0.79
1880	10629	13517	24146	-199	-132	-331	0.79
1881	10710	13606	24316	233	338	571	0.79
1882	11128	14078	25206	-347	-385	-732	0.79
1883	10968	13893	24861	-373	-118	-491	0.79
1884	10785	14009	24794	20	209	229	0.77
1885	11017	14345	25362	-447	-210	-657	0.77
1886	10779	14191	24970	67	147	214	0.76
1887	10977	14450	25427	-241	-54	-295	0.76
1888	11019	14644	25663	-229	-179	-408	0.75
1889	11059	14728	25787	1	150	151	0.75
1890	11152	14893	26045	-122	100	-22	0.75
1891	11307	15277	26584	310	195	505	0.74

Year	<i>Population</i>			<i>Net migration</i>			<i>Sex ratio</i>
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
1892	11866	15627	27254	869	-165	704	0.76
1893	12962	15596	27319	-1225	172	-1053	0.83
1894	12071	15944	27763	-79	-31	-110	0.76
1895	12278	16137	28187	-120	161	41	0.76
1896	12430	16454	29081	29	-358	-329	0.76
1897	12714	16384	29098	-60	-24	-84	0.78
1898	12975	16583	29558	262	72	334	0.78
1899	13285	16834	30119	-61	307	246	0.79
1900	13390	17246	30636	-285	96	-189	0.78
1901	13306	17515	30821	47	77	124	0.76
1902	13565	17786	31351	-395	-166	-561	0.76
1903	13501	17870	31371	37	58	95	0.76
1904	13608	17899	31507	-247	-558	-805	0.76
1905	13534	17556	31090	-709	-205	-914	0.77
1906	12951	17450	30401	316	302	618	0.74
1907	13251	17632	30883	153	-197	-44	0.75
1908	13707	17699	31406	153	-463	-310	0.77
1909	13972	17295	31924	134	799	933	0.81
1910	14310	18275	32846	-261	-194	-455	0.78
1911	14398	18448	32846	-185	-130	-315	0.78
1912	14447	18479	32926	46	207	253	0.78
1913	14455	18504	32959	58	237	295	0.78
1914	14613	18748	33677	-25	47	22	0.78
1915	14763	18914	33677	-13	471	458	0.78
1916	14798	19370	34168	329	93	422	0.76
1917	15269	19624	34893	-559	-257	-816	0.78

Source: Koloniale verslagen 1863-1918

From 1863 until 1917 the Curaçaoan population increased from 19,144 to 34,893 people, or 82 per cent over a period of 54 years. This demographic growth was the net outcome of two countervailing trends: natural population growth on the one hand and decrease due to an emigration surplus of 3125 on the other. There are two remarkable gender contrasts in this demographic chart. First, with a sex ratio oscillating between 0.74 and 0.85, there was a strong female domination in the total population. Second, there is an imbalance in migration patterns: for women an immigration surplus was recorded (1121), for men an emigration surplus (4346). The latter imbalance only explains a fraction of the total gender imbalance.

DI KI MANERA?

The social history of the Afro-Curaçaoans, 1863-1917.

HOE DOEN WE HET?

De sociale geschiedenis van de Afro-Curaeënaars, 1863-1917.

Rose Mary Allen

In deze dissertatie staan de culturele processen centraal die het dagelijkse leven van Afro-Curaçaoënaars na de afschaffing van de slavernij (1863) hebben beïnvloed. Er wordt gekeken naar de invloed die de koloniale overheid, de voormalige slavenhouders en vooral de Rooms-Katholieke kerk uitoefenden op het leven van de Afro-Curaçaoënaars na de emancipatie. Ook wordt nagegaan hoe deze groep een eigen invulling gaf aan de vrijheid en hoe zij omging met de interventies van hogerhand. Het begrip macht staat hierbij centraal. Deze was zeer ongelijk verdeeld: economische, sociale en raciale ongelijkheid kenmerkten de negentiende-eeuwse Curaçaoëse maatschappij.

De hoofdvraag in het proefschrift luidt: welke rol speelden de overheid, de voormalige slavenhouders en de Rooms-Katholieke kerk in het leven van de Afro-Curaçaoënaars na de emancipatie, en op welke wijze hebben de Afro-Curaçaoënaars zowel binnen als buiten de beïnvloedsferen van deze instituten invulling kunnen geven aan hun materiele, sociale en geestelijke leven.

Er is tot nu toe nog maar weinig studie verricht naar de thematiek van slavernij en haar erfenissen in de Curaçaoëse geschiedenis. Daarin loopt Curaçao achter in vergelijking met een aantal andere landen van de Cariben, waar veel eerder studies zijn verschenen in de sfeer van 'slavery from within'. Ook is er weinig onderzoek gedaan naar de manier, waarop de Afro-Curaçaoënaars na 1863 richting hebben gegeven aan hun leven. In dat Emancipatiejaar kregen zo'n 6000 slaven op het eiland hun vrijheid. Dat betrof vijfendertig procent van de totale bevolking. Op dit eiland bestond dus al voor de emancipatie reeds een grote groep van vrijgemaakte slaven. In Suriname ging het om vijfenvijftig procent op een totale bevolking van 60.000 mensen. In dit opzicht verschilt Curaçao niet alleen van Suriname, maar ook van de rest van de Cariben.

In zijn ten geleide bij het schoolmakende boek van Harry Hoetink, *Het patroon van de oude Curaçaoëse samenleving*, schreef de socioloog Rudolph van Lier dat de sociale situatie na de emancipatie maar weinig veranderde aan het karakter van de oude Curaçaoëse samenleving. De Utrechtse socioloog Harry Hoetink bestudeerde als eerste de Curaçaoëse samenleving vanuit een sociaal-historische context. Zijn studie onderstreepte Van Liers stelling. Dit geldt ook voor de dissertatie *Un pueblo na kaminda* van de Curaçaoëse socioloog René Romer, die stelde dat pas de komst van de olieraffinaderij in de twintigste eeuw een fundamentele verandering inluidde in de sociale geschiedenis van het eiland en in de sociale positie van de zwarte Curaçaoënaars. Ook latere schrijvers benadrukten dat deze nazaten in armoedige situatie verder moesten leven.

De vraag blijft dan toch in hoeverre deze groep, binnen de bestaande machtsbegrepen, haar eigen leefwijze heeft kunnen creëren en bepalen. De formeel verkregen

vrijheid vergde immers adaptaties en heroriëntaties, niet alleen op het gebied van handelen, maar ook in het denken en voelen. Om verder invulling te geven aan de vrijheid en hun aspiraties en verwachtingen waar te maken, moesten zij deels voortbouwen op de kennis en ideeën, die zij zich in de jaren van slavernij hadden eigen gemaakt, deels zich nieuwe ideeën en houdingen aanleren.

In het eerste hoofdstuk van het proefschrift wordt het theoretische kader vastgelegd. De ontwikkeling van de Curaçaose geschiedschrijving wordt geschetst, met bijzondere aandacht voor de plaats die Afro-Curaçaoënaars daarin kregen. Daar deze studie zich op het snijvlak bevindt van geschiedenis en antropologie, wordt nagegaan welke theorieën er gebruikt zijn om sociaal-culturele processen in Curaçao en, ruimer, in het Caribische gebied als geheel te analyseren. Het begrip culturele complexiteit, waarmee in deze dissertatie wordt gewerkt, staat daarbij centraal. Dit begrip wordt tegenwoordig gebruikt om aan te geven hoe globalisering culturen voortdurend confronteert met nieuwe processen, goederen en betekenissen. Caribische samenlevingen hebben zulke processen al eeuwenlang meegemaakt, altijd in een situatie van zeer onevenwichtige economische, sociale en raciale machtsverhoudingen.

In het tweede hoofdstuk wordt nader ingegaan op de methodologie die gehanteerd is bij deze studie. Een groot deel van de informatie is gebaseerd op interviews die ik in de jaren tachtig van de vorige eeuw heb gehouden met oudere mensen uit de Curaçaose samenleving, die eind negentiende eeuw, begin twintigste eeuw waren geboren. De uitkomsten hiervan werden getoetst aan informatie verkregen uit verschillende soorten geschreven bronnen en uit de orale bronnen van de Zikinzá-collectie. Laatstgenoemde collectie, nu ondergebracht in het Nationale Archief, bevat interviews die rond 1960 door pater Paul Brenneker en Elis Juliana werden afgenomen. Ook heb ik gebruik gemaakt van interviews die door Brenneker en Juliana werden afgenomen en die gearhiveerd zijn in de Openbare Bibliotheek van Curaçao.

In hoofdstuk drie wordt het leven van vòòr 1863 bestudeerd en geanalyseerd. Het gaat er daarin vooral om de belangrijkste kenmerken te benoemen die het dagelijkse leven van slaven hebben bepaald. In dit hoofdstuk worden culturele karakteristieken van de slavengemeenschap beschreven, als ook die van de 'vrije zwarten' en 'kleurlingen' in deze periode. Cultuur is immers een dynamisch proces. Wat na de emancipatie gebeurde vloeide mede voort uit de wijze waarop het culturele leven zich voordien had ontwikkeld.

Het vierde hoofdstuk draait om de percepties die leefden ten aanzien van de vraag hoe Afro-Curaçaoënaars zouden omgaan met de verkregen vrijheid. Deze beelden komen duidelijk tot uiting in toespraken van gezagdragers en leden van de Rooms-Katholieke Kerk. De Afro-Curaçaose perceptie over die vrijheid vond een neerslag onder meer in liederen en de mondelinge overlevering.

De hoofdstukken vijf en zes zijn gericht op de twee instituties met het meeste gezag in en macht over het sociale leven van de Afro-Curaçaoënaars. Het vijfde hoofdstuk bespreekt de sociale controle van de koloniale staat. De overheid kwam in het kader van de emancipatie met regels en reglementen om het sociale gedrag van de pas vrijgeworden Afro-Curaçaoënaars te beïnvloeden. Deze regels waren mede gebaseerd op het beeld dat de lokale elites van deze groep heeft. Veel Afro-Curaçaoënaars bleven op de plantages wonen via het '*paga tera*' systeem, waarbij zij verplicht waren in ruil voor het landgebruik een aan-

tal dagen per jaar gratis voor de plantagehouder te werken. Indirect had laatstgenoemde ook sociale controle op hun leven. Via regels op het gebied van openbare orde probeerde de koloniale overheid daarnaast het sociale gedrag van mensen die buiten de beïnvloedingsfeer van de plantageeigenaren woonden te regelen.

De invloed van de Rooms-Katholieke kerk is heel bepalend gebleken voor het sociaal-culturele leven van de Afro-Curaçaoënaars. Door de kerstening van slaven en vrijen werd zij de grootste christelijke kerk op het eiland. In haar 'beschavingsoffensief' intervenueerde de kerk rechtstreeks in het dagelijkse leven van deze groep. Dit gebeurde onder meer via het onderwijs en maatschappelijke hulp. De kerk probeerde haar volgelingen 'correct' gedrag bij te brengen. De middelen hiertoe varieerden van prediking en indoctrinatie tot fysieke kastijding. In dit hoofdstuk wordt tevens onderzocht hoe de Afro-Curaçaoënaars deze beïnvloeding door staat en kerk internaliseerden in het dagelijkse leven, of zich hier juist tegen verzetten.

In de volgende drie hoofdstukken wordt weergegeven hoe het dagelijkse leven van de Afro-Curaçaoënaars vorm kreeg buiten bovengenoemde kaders. De relatie tussen macht en sociale marginalisering heb ik tot uitdrukking willen brengen door middel van het Papiamentse woord '*bida*', dat leven betekent. Deze term werd heel vaak gebruikt in de interviews met nazaten van slaven. De term betekent veel meer dan alleen maar leven. Het verwijst naar de pluriforme en complexe wijzen waarop Afro-Curaçaoënaars ook na de emancipatie zelf richting probeerden te geven aan hun leven. In deze hoofdstukken wordt het dagelijkse leven bekeken vanuit economische, sociale en spirituele perspectieven.

Hoofdstuk zeven, '*Buska bida*' (letterlijk 'het zoeken naar leven') behandelt de vraag welke strategieën Afro-Curaçaoënaars ontwikkelden om economisch te kunnen overleven, rekeninghoudend met de problematische natuurlijke gesteldheid van het eiland. Er wordt gekeken naar het sterke verlangen om door bezit van een stuk land onafhankelijk van de plantagehouders te kunnen leven. Deze behielden na de emancipatie immers veel macht over het land. De emigratie naar landen in de buurt was een andere overlevingsstrategie en werd vooral door mannen opmerkelijk vaak gebruikt om werk en inkomen te zoeken.

In hoofdstuk acht, '*Drecha bida*' (te vertalen als 'verbetering van het sociale leven') wordt onderzocht hoe men invulling gaf aan het sociale leven. Dit betrof de relatie man-vrouw en ouder(s)-kinderen, maar ook de ruimere familieverbanden. Centraal staat hier de vraag wat door de groep zelf gezien wordt als een respectvolle leefwijze tussen man en vrouw en tussen ouder(s) en kinderen en in hoeverre men er in slaagde hieraan gestalte te geven.

Hoofdstuk negen, '*Tambú di bida*' ('de trommel van het leven') analyseert de levensvisie en levenshouding van de Afro-Curaçaoënaars zoals deze zich in en vooral na de slavernij ontwikkelde in de context die zo sterk werd bepaald door moeizame sociaal-economische omstandigheden en ongelijke machtsrelaties.

Het tiende en laatste hoofdstuk biedt de conclusies van het proefschrift. De nadruk ligt op de complexiteit van het sociale leven na de emancipatie. Deze complexiteit werd mede bepaald door de gevarieerdheid in de samenstelling van de Afro-Curaçaoëse bevolking zelf. Reeds tijdens de slavernij kon men niet spreken van een monolithische groep. Deze gevarieerdheid werd bepaald door verschillende factoren, zoals de plaats van herkomst in Afrika, het aantal generaties dat aanwezig was in de Curaçaoëse samenleving, variaties in

huidskleur en andere fysieke kenmerken, *gender*, generatie en de vraag of men slaaf was of reeds vrij. Aan deze differentiaties werden onmiskenbaar culturele waarderingen gehecht. Na de emancipatie nam de interne diversiteit slechts toe. Deze context bepaalde mede hoe succesvol de beïnvloedingsstrategieën van de koloniale staat, de voormalige slavenhouders en Rooms-Katholieke kerk konden zijn, en evengoed hoe verschillende groepen en individuen binnen de Afro-Curaçaose bevolkingsgroep zelf inhoud gaven aan hun levens. Dit proefschrift poogt inzicht te geven in processen die het denken en handelen van mensen in onze hedendaagse Curaçaosche maatschappij nog steeds bepalen. Heel vaak zijn wij ons er niet van bewust hoe diepgaand deze ideeën nog doorwerken in ons denken en handelen. De reflectie over ons verleden kan ons ook helpen in onze oriëntatie op onze hedendaagse uitdagingen.

DI KI MANERA?

Historia sosial di afro-kurasoleñonan, 1863-1917.

Rose Mary Allen

Sentral den e disertashon akí ta e prosesonan kultural ku a influensia bida di tur dia di afro-kurasoleñonan despues ku na 1863 a abolí sklabilitut. A pone den foko e influensia ku gobièrnu kolonial, doñonan di katibu den nan tempu i prinsipalmente Iglesia katóliko a ehersé riba bida di afro-kurasoleñonan despues di emansipashon. A verifiká tambe kon e grupo akí a duna contenido propio na e libertat ku nan a haña i kon e hendenan akí a anda ku intervenshon di gobièrnu. E konsepto 'poder' den e kaso akí ta di mayor importansia. Poder tabata repartí di forma desigual: desigualdat ekonómiko, sosial i rasial a karakterisá e sosiedat kurasoleño di siglo djesnuebe.

E pregunta klave den e tesis akí ta: ki papel gobièrnu, e shonnan, doño di katibu i Iglesia katóliko tabatin den bida di afro-kurasoleñonan despues di emansipashon i di ki manera afro-kurasoleñonan por a duna contenido na nan bida material, sosial i spiritual tantu paden komo pafó di e ambiente di influensia di e institushonnan akí.

Te ainda no tin mashá estudio hasí riba e temátika di sklabilitut i su herensia den historia di Kòrsou. Den e sentido akí Kòrsou ta kana atras kompará ku un kantidat di otro pais den Karibe, kaminda muchu mas promé a sali estudio den e esfera di 'slavery from within' (sklabilitut for di paden). No a hasi muchu investigashon tampoko tokante e manera ku despues di 1863 afro-kurasoleñonan a programá nan bida. Den a aña ei di emansipashon 6000 katibu na isla di Kòrsou a haña nan libertat o sea trintisinku porshentu di e poblashon total. Promé ku emansipashon na e isla akí tabata eksistí kaba un grupo grandi di katibu liberá. Na Sürnam tabata trata di sinkuentisinku porshentu di un poblashon total di 60.000 hende. Den e sentido akí Kòrsou ta diferensia di Sürnam, i tambe for di sobrá di Karibe.

Den introdukshon di e famoso buki di Harry Hoetink *Het patroon van de oude Curaçaoose samenleving*, e sosiólogo Rudolph van Lier a skibi ku e situashon sosial despues di emansipashon a trese mashá poko kambio den karakter di e komunidad kurasoleño bieu. E sosiólogo di Utrecht Harry Hoetink ta e promé hende ku a studia e komunidad kurasoleño for di un konteksto sosial-históriko. Su estudio a suprayá e ponensia di Van Lier. Meskos ta konta tambe pa e disertashon *Un pueblo na kaminda* di e sosiólogo kurasoleño René Römer, kende a mustra ku ta te ora e refinaria di petroli a bini di na siglo binti, esei a trese un kambio fundamental den e historia sosial di e isla i den e posishon sosial di e kurasoleño pretu. E eskritornan ku a publiká despues tambe a enfatisá ku e desendiente-nan akí a haña nan ta sigui biba den pobresa.

E pregunta ta keda sin embargo den ki medida e grupo akí por a krea i determiná nan propio estilo, denter di e limitashonnan di poder eksistente. Di pursi e libertat optené formalmente tabata eksigi adaptashon i reorientashon, no solamente riba tereno di trato, sino tambe riba e manera di pensa i di sinti. Pa duna contenido na e libertat i pa realisá nan aspirashon- i ekspektativanan, nan mester a sigui edifiká parsialmente riba e konosementu- i

ideanan ku durante e añanan di sklabitut nan a hasi di nan, i parsialmente nan mester a siña idea- i akitutnan nobo.

Den e promé kapitulo di e tésis ta deliniá e kader teóriko. Ta skèts desaroyo di e historiografia kurasoleño, ku atenshon spesial pa e lugá ku afro-kurasoleñonan a haña den dje. Komo e estudio akí ta nèt den e intersekshon di historia i antropologia, ta verifiká kua ta e teorlanan ku a usa pa analisá e prosesonan sosial-kultural na Kòrsou i, den un sentido mas amplio, den teritorio di Karibe komo totalidat. Sentral a pone e konseptu 'komplehidat kultural', ku kua a traha den e disertashon akí. Awendia ta usa e konseptu akí pa indiká kon globalisashon kontinuamente ta konfrontá kulturanan ku proseso-, merkansia- i nifikashonnan nobo. Komunitatnan karibeño a pasa durante hopi siglo kaba den prosesonan asina, semper den un situashon di proporshonnan di poder ekonómiko, sosial i rasial sumamente desekilibrá.

Den e di dos kapitulo ta sigui elaborá riba e metodologia ku a usa pa hasi e estudio akí. Gran parti di e informashon ta basá riba entrevista ku e outor a tene na añanan ochenta di siglo pasá ku personanan di edat mas avansá di e komunitat kurasoleño, kendenan a nase na fin di siglo djesnuebe, prinsipio di siglo binti. A komprobá e resultatdonan ku informashon optené di vários fuente skibí i fuente oral di e kolekshon Zikinzá. E último kolekshon akí, ku awor ta na Archivo Nashonal ta kontené entrevista ku alrededor di aña 1960 pader Paul Brenneker i Elis Juliana a tene. Mí a hasi uso tambe di e entrevistanan ku Brenneker i Juliana a tene i ku ta wardá na Biblioteca Públiko di Kòrsou.

Den kapitulo tres a studia i analisá e bida di promé ku 1863. Ta nombra akí prinsipalmente e karakterístikanan mas importante ku a determiná bida diario di e katibunan. Den e kapitulo akí ta deskribí e karakterístikanan kultural di e komunitat di katibu, meskos tambe esun di e 'pretunan liberá' i di 'e hendenan di koló' den e periodo akí. Anto kultura ta un proseso dinámiko. Loke a sosodé despues di emansipashon ta resultado tambe di e manera ku e bida kultural a desaroyá promé ku esei.

E di kuater kapitulo ta trata di e persepsionnan ku tabata eksistí respekto di e pregunta kon afro-kurasoleñonan lo bai anda ku nan libertat atkirí. E imágennan akí ta sali klaramente na kla den diskurso di mandatarío- i miembronan di Iglesia katóliko. E persepsion afro-kurasoleño tokante e libertat ei a reflehá entre otro den kantika i tradishon oral.

E kapitulonon sinku i seis ta dirigí riba e dos institushonnan ku tin e mayor outoridat i poder riba bida sosial di afro-kurasoleñonan. Kapitulo sinku ta trata e kontròl sosial di estado kolonial. Den kuadro di emansipashon gobièrnu a bini ku regla- i reglamento pa influensí komportashon sosial di e afro-kurasoleñonan ku a kaba di haña nan libertat. E reglanan akí tabata basá tambe riba e imágen ku e élite lokal tin di e grupo akí. Hopi afro-kurasoleño a keda biba riba e plantashinan den e sistema di '*paga tera*'. E katibunan e ora ei a kambio di uso di tera, mester a traha grátis un kantidat di dia pa aña pa doño di e plantashi. Indirektamente esakí tabatin tambe kontròl sosial riba nan bida. Pa medio di regla riba tereno di òrdu públiko gobièrnu kolonial a purba regla ademá komportashon sosial di e hendenan ku tabata biba fuera di e ambiente di influencia di e doñonan di plantashi. Influencia di Iglesia katóliko a resultá mashá desisivo pa bida sosio-kultural di afro-kurasoleñonan. Pa medio di kristianisá e katibunan i esnan ku a bira liber, Iglesia katóliko a bira e iglesia kristian mas grandi na e isla. Den su afan di trese 'sivilisashon' Iglesia katóliko tabata intervení direktamente den bida diario di e grupo. Esaki tabata tuma lugá entre otro

via enseñansa i yudansa sosial. Iglesia tabata purba siña su siguidónan un komportashon 'korekto'. E medionan pa logra esaki tabata varia di predikashi i indoktrinashon te kastigu fisiko. Den e kapitulo akí a investigá ademas kon afro-kurasoleñonan a internalisá e influensia akí ku estado i iglesia tabata ehersé, òf si presisamente nan tabata duna resistensia. E tres kapitulo ku ta sigui ta interpretá kon bida diario di afro-kurasoleñonan a forma *fuera* di e kadernan menshoná aki riba. E relashon entre poder i e marginalisashon sosial mi a purba ekspresá pa medio di e palabra '*bida*'. Ku mashá frekuensia por tende desendientenan di katibu usa e término akí den e entrestanan. E término ta nifiká muchu mas ku solamente bida. E ta referí na e forman pluriforme i kompleho ku kua despues di emansipashon afro-kurasoleñonan mes a purba duna rumbo na nan bida. Den e kapitulo akí ta studia bida diario desde perspektivanan ekonómiko, sosial i spiritual.

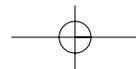
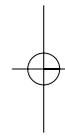
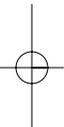
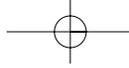
Kapítulo shete, '*Buska bida*' ta trata e pregunta kua ta e strategianan ku afro-kurasoleñonan a desaroyá pa por a sobreviví ekonómikamente, teniendo kuenta ku e kondishon problemátiko di naturalesa di e isla. A studia e deseo fuerte pa mediante pida tera por a biba independiente di e doñonan di plantashi. Di pursi e hendenan akí a keda ku hopi poder riba e tera komo nan propiedat. Emigrashon pa otro paisnan den besindario tabata un otro strategia pa sobreviví i ta notabel ku prinsipalmente hende hòMBER a emigrá pa bai buska trabou i entrada.

Den kapitulo ocho, '*Drecha bida*' (ku por interpretá komo 'mehorá bida sosial') a investigá kon a duna contenido na bida sosial. Ta trata e relashon hòMBER-muhé i mayor i yu, pero tambe e lasonan mas ekstenso di famia. Sentral ta aki e pregunta kiko e grupo mes a mira komo un sistema di bida respetuoso entre hòMBER i muhé i entre mayor i yu i den ki medida a logra duna forma na esaki.

Kapítulo nueve, '*Tambú di bida*' ta analisá e vishon i e aktitut di bida ku afro-kurasoleñonan a desaroyá pa nan mes durante i prinsipalmente despues di abolishon di sklabilitut den e konteksto ku asina fuerte situashonnan sosio-ekonómiko difisil i relashonnan di poder desigual a determiná.

E di dies i último kapitulo ta ofresé e konklushonnan di e tésis. Énfasis ta riba komplehidat di e bida sosial despues di emansipashon. Loke a determiná e komplehidat akí tambe ta e diversidat den komposishon di e pueblo afro-kurasoleño. Durante sklabilitut mes kaba no por a papia di un grupo monolítico. Diferente faktor tabata determiná e diversidat akí, manera e lugá di prosedensia na Áfrika, e kantidat di generashon presente den e komunidad kurasoleño, e variedat di koló di kueru i otro karakteristikanan fisiko, *gender*, generashon i e pregunta si un hende tabata katibu òf si e tabata liber kaba. A duna balor kultural indiskutibel na e diferensashonnan akí. Despues di emansipashon ta oumentá so e diversidat akí a oumentá. E konteksto akí a yuda fiha kon eksitoso e strategianan di influensia di estado kolonial, e èks-doñonan di katibu i Iglesia katóliko por tabata i meskos tambe kon e diferente grupo- i individuonan denter di e grupo di poblashon afro-kurasoleño mes a duna contenido na nan bida.

E tésis akí ta purba duna un bista di e prosesonan ku te ainda ta di influensia riba manera di pensa i di aktua di hende den e komunidad kurasoleño di awendia. Hopi biaha nos no ta konsiente kon profundo e ideanan akí ta sigui influí den nos manera di pensa i di aktua. Reflekshon riba nos pasado tambe por yuda nos orientá riba nos retonan di awendia.



Curriculum vitae

Rose Mary Allen was born on December 25, 1950 in Curaçao, Netherlands Antilles. From 1965-1969 she visited the Maria Immaculata Lyceum in Curaçao, after which she studied sociology and afterwards cultural anthropology at the Catholic University of Nijmegen, the Netherlands. In 1977 she received her Master's degree in Cultural and Social Anthropology and returned to Curaçao. There she worked as a researcher and staff member at the Institute of Archeology and Anthropology of the Netherlands Antilles (AAINA) until the institute's demise in 1998.

As part of her research at AAINA, Rose Mary Allen conducted many interviews with descendants of enslaved Africans on several islands of the Netherlands Antilles in order to document their lives in the post-emancipation period. Meanwhile she started to work on her dissertation on Afro-Curaçaoan social life in post emancipation Curaçao. This dissertation draws largely on the collected oral histories of Afro-Curaçaoans.

Presently Rose Mary Allen is working as a consultant and lecturer at different institutes of higher learning on Curaçao. She has published several articles on the cultural and social history of Afro-Curaçao.

Colofon

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