

CHAPTER II

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

Introduction

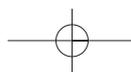
The British historian Edward Thompson emphasizes in his seminal work on the origins of the English working class (1977) that historiography should aim at remembering ‘the poor stocker, the Luddite cropper, the “obsolete” hand-loom weaver, the “utopian” artisan and even the deluded follower of Joanna 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).

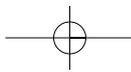
Increasingly this approach has found acceptance among historians. There has been a change in the approach of studying the past, by examining large groups of people previously neglected in historiography. Historians are now aware that they cannot interpret history as a sequence of events in which only 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.

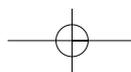
Since the use of oral sources is central to my study I would like to move away from the debate about their value and importance for historical writing. In this Chapter I will focus on how I use oral sources as material for historical reading, specifically for the purpose of examining the cultural complexity 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.

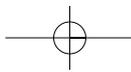
Oral Sources as a Basis for Study

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.

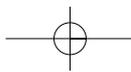
In theory this distinction can be made. However, in a field situation the line is harder to draw and is continually being crossed by 'the bearers of testimonies' (Dorson 1979:9). According to Richard Dorson one should not overlook the fact that, firstly, over time oral history will incorporate folk elements, 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).

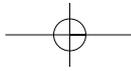
The following part of an interview demonstrates a mnemonic pattern of repetition:

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.

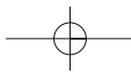
R.A.: *Were there more people working?*

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

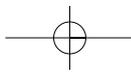
and what they had experienced themselves. For example, they would distance themselves from the information by saying: 'segun mi a tende' (as I have heard it), or 'nan di' (so they have said), or 'mi a lanta tende' (while I was growing up I heard). But when they wanted to make precise comments, they would 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.



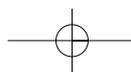
Cross-checking Oral Data with Written Documents

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.

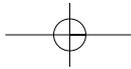
Historically, on Curaçao oral information tended to be published under the term 'folklore'.¹⁰ In general these data were studied by literary scholars who looked at style, character and symbolism in the same way as they did when studying literature. I will examine these data from a historical perspective. 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.



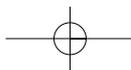
The collector does not mention whether his stories are verbatim reproductions of his raconteurs or whether he left out certain passages. Most scholars of folklore studies are confronted with this issue of censorship: material may have been altered by leaving out certain parts of stories and songs deemed 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

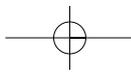
In 1926 H. van Cappelle published the Dutch versions of the same Curaçaoan Nanzi stories which had appeared in 1899. He did this together with stories from Suriname, Jamaica and St. Eustatius, in doing so creating the first comparative collection in the field. It is worth noting that in his introduction, 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.

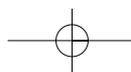
In the aforementioned publication of 1899 the author did point out the *multi-genre* aspect of these stories: the story-tellers made use of sign language, modulations and songs. Latour, in his introduction, also mentioned that story-telling would generally be accompanied by body language: signs, mimicking 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).



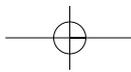
In addition, translating these stories from Papiamentu into Dutch may have led to the loss of important elements. The translations lacked, for example, the numerous accompanying sayings and proverbs providing us with information on the assumptions and ideas of people in the past. Van Cappelle recognized 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.

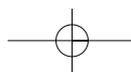
As the Nanzi stories have been more thoroughly documented than others, a broader scientific approach has become possible. They are not timeless as they have been subject to alteration over time, with their main elements remaining intact. Baart (1983) links the stories collected by Geerdink-Jessurun Pinto 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).

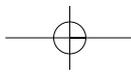
Recorded Folk Songs

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.

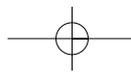
This is illustrated in the travels by the priest 'Ipi' from Curaçao²⁷, who met with interest in Curaçaoan folk songs during a trip around the United States in 1884. Upon his return, Ipi admitted in the *Amigoe* of 28 June 1884 that when asked by his American friends to sing songs from Curaçao, at first 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.

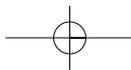
The interest in these songs of father Jansen, alias Cobi, is further manifested in a request in the newspaper *La Union* of 2 April 1890, asking readers to send him *kantika di makamba*. A month earlier, Cobi had mentioned in the same paper songs such as 'Foe-doeuwe', 'Guiara' and 'Hoenja lamanta para', 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.

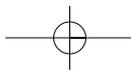
The study of proverbs is useful for determining the values, principles and social norms guiding the behaviour of people (Dorson 1983:184). Historically there has been an interest in Papiamentu proverbs. Although until the beginning of the twentieth century this language was generally considered primitive, 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.

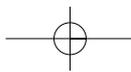
One large omission in all these collections is that they lack context. This should not be overlooked, as a close relationship exists between context, function and meaning (Arewa and Dundes 1964:70-85). Proverbs as linguistic units are subject to general language rules, but their specific meaning is generated 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

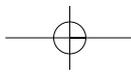
The popular class used proverbs to educate their siblings. Thus, children were warned that ‘Yu ku no ta tende ku mama, ta kai den boka di kolebra’ (Children who do not listen to their mother will fall into the snake’s mouth). In various traditional Curaçaoan stories, songs and other oral testimonies, 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.

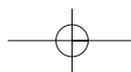
To conclude, proverbs are prime indicators of how people reflected upon their lives. Their use in interviews served to emphasize the importance of certain matters.

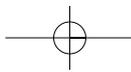
Life of the Popular Class

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





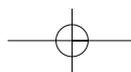
Meeteren himself seemed influenced by Jos Schrijnen, a leading specialist in Dutch folklore (1930-1933). Van Meeteren describes wide ranging folkloric aspects in the life of Afro-Curaçaoans. He occupied himself with phenomena suiting the folkloric canon – ceremonies, rituals, beliefs, clothes, food, 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.

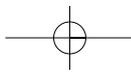
Van Meeteren was interested in the origins of specific customs and their comparison with customs in other societies, in line with other early folkloric scholars in Europe. His work reveals an evolutionist approach. According to him, culture developed in stages. He viewed the Dutch culture as the highest 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

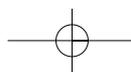
Cross-checking with the Brenneker/Juliana Collection

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.

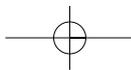
At times Brenneker and Juliana were criticized, and also gossiped about for their engagement in this type of activity. Following his weekly column in the *Amigoe*, in which he had talked about the spirits of the dead and even mentioned names of people who had died in a car accident a few days earlier,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

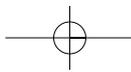
Source: Kontenido di Zikinzá Curaçao 1974

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).

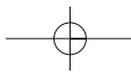
Brenneker and Juliana also conducted research in other areas, such as the names of plants and fish as well as nicknames and personal matters. They gathered information on folk beliefs and customs regarding conception, pregnancy, birth and infancy, dating, courtship and marriage, healing and remedies,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