

CHAPTER VII

Buska Bida: Making a Living

Post-emancipation Curaçao was a heterogeneous society, comprising a variety of racial and ethnic groups unequal in terms of wealth, status and power. In this society, economic standing followed colour lines with power lying in the hands of a select group (Hoetink 1987; Römer 1979). For the most part Afro-Curaçaoans lacked power, both economically and politically. The key question I will seek to answer in this and the following two Chapters is: how did these factors affect the everyday lives of the freedpeople?

Scholars have intensively studied the daily life of subjugated people. Holger Henke (2004) stresses the necessity of uncovering the everyday life of people in the Caribbean, as it holds the sources of Caribbean thought. For Henke, the difficulty in researching daily life revolves around finding out what people find relevant in their lives and give significance to. Should everyday life be studied as 'a sequence of dull and ordinary acts and products' or as the 'extraordinary or bizarre' in people's lives? Either approach presents a challenge. In the first, every type of activity can be considered part of daily life, thus leading to an abundance of data. The second approach confronts us with the question of how to relate the extraordinary and bizarre to recurring cultural activities and behaviour patterns (2004:3). At an earlier stage the cultural philosopher Michael de Certeau also emphasized the importance of studying day-to-day life in his book *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980). De Certeau states that daily life should not be conceived as 'merely the obscure background of social activity' and therefore be concealed. Instead, it is necessary to 'penetrate this obscurity and to "articulate" it' (1980:4).

I will explore how, following emancipation, Afro-Curaçaoans lived their daily lives and how they went about this within the parameters of the two key institutions with power: the State and the Roman Catholic Church. I will look at how, despite their subjugated status, they were able to become important arbiters in managing their lives. The question I will seek to answer is: in what ways did they try to give meaning to their daily existence in a material, social and spiritual sense? Answering this question requires insight into the actions taken by men and women in their attempt to take control of their lives within the boundaries of the power system. In that sense I will address the interrelationship between power and culture in an attempt to answer the much larger question of how culture revealed itself in the everyday lives of Afro-Curaçaoans.

Understanding Afro-Curaçaoan Everyday Life

Using the concept of *bida*, here and in the following two Chapters, I will focus on the dynamics of Afro-Curaçaoans' material, social and spiritual lives. *Bida* simply means life and is used in connection with many different aspects of people's daily lives. In trying to comprehend post-emancipation everyday life of Afro-Curaçaoans, certain issues need to be considered. After 1863 the Roman Catholic Church and the State introduced several mechanisms of social control. The Church in particular played an important role in attempting to change the Afro-Curaçaoans' ways of life, with the goal of creating, through Catholicism, a type of culture considered civilized and respectable.

These processes of cultural influence emanating from the existing power relationship between former slaves on the one hand and former masters, the Church and the State on the other, made the lives of Afro-Curaçaoans ever more complex. We then see a similar phenomenon taking place as elsewhere in the Caribbean: the attempt of a small group of Afro-Curaçaoans, forming part of an emerging coloured middle class, to adapt as much as possible to this culture of respectability. The greater part of this group lived in town, in neighbourhoods such as Otrobanda and Punda, with some holding positions in commerce. This group looked down on those lacking the same degree of culture and respectability and would voice this in many ways.

The land on which one lived was an important marker of social standing among Afro-Curaçaoans. Firstly, a division existed between town (Punda and Otrobanda) and the kunuku: Banda Bou (western countryside) and Banda Riba (eastern countryside).¹ Those living in town emphasized their cunning and bravery to distinguish themselves from those in the countryside. The *hende di Punda*, as they called themselves, differed from the *hende di kunuku* in the way that the former were believed to be cunning and brave while the latter were thought of as being docile, submissive and even stupid. In the interviews I conducted, people would use the term 'muchu di Punda, mi ta' (I am a child of Punda) to explain why they had behaved in a brave way or had been able to outwit those with power.

People from the kunuku were also considered to be less respectable than those in town. For example, they were labelled as talking too loudly and in an uncivilized manner. Their Papiamentu was coarse ('Papia manera hende di kunuku').² However, people from town also thought fondly of the kunuku. And there was an underlying respect for the people living there. It was, for example, commonly known that in the kunuku there continued the practice of traditional cures and use of medicinal plants. For example Ma Yaya Felipa, born around 1870, who lived in Barber (Banda Bou), was widely known for her capacity to cure people; her reputation attracted many visitors from town.³

Secondly, there was the division between the two parts of the kunuku: Banda Riba (in the east) and Banda Bou (in the west). Already before emancipation, a large group had been able to live as freedpeople in the kunuku, using the social opportunities available to them. Many of them lived in Banda Riba, which was nearer to town. In contrast, most of those freed in 1863 lived in Banda Bou. Hoetink (1958:84) writes that Afro-Curaçaoans classified themselves according to whether they were descendants of slaves freed before or in 1863. During interviews, people often emphasized that they did not descend from slaves. Some would pride themselves in their light complexion. An interviewee born in 1878 related with great satisfaction to Paul Brenneker: 'Mi tata no tabata katibu. Nos aki

no ta salí di katibu, pero ela biba i kasa den tempu di katibu' (My father was not a slave. We are not descendants of slaves, but my father lived and married during the period of slavery).⁴

Most of the data in this and the following two Chapters come from oral sources, as they have been the primary tool by which people expressed their day-to-day experiences. At the time, Afro-Curaçaoans formed an oral-based community, communicating their personal and communal concerns principally in an oral form, especially through songs sung during work and leisure, which were an outlet of communal and individual release, as well as a vehicle for expressing joy, anger and protest. It was not until the beginning of the twentieth century that a small group of Afro-Curaçaoans began expressing themselves in prose, mainly written in Papiamentu.⁵

Daily Life and the Search for Land

In the Caribbean the limited availability of land has always been an issue. Engerman affirms that land, besides the scarcity of labour, has been a key constraint on economic opportunities in most Caribbean countries. He further argues that many scholars have approached the subject of land supply in the region from an economic perspective. They examined post-1863 land-labour ratios and land ownership in order to explain the varying outcomes of emancipation in terms of changes in plantation output, non-plantation opportunities open to former slaves, their standards of living, and even the success of political control in influencing the distribution of incomes among members of these societies (1992:58). Renkema's study of plantation life on Curaçao (1981a) has added a new dimension to the understanding of land use before and after emancipation as he addressed questions regarding the provision of land on the island and also examined the restrictions placed on blacks in attaining a piece of land.

A close examination of the written documents reveals the enormous desire for land among Afro-Curaçaoans in the first years following emancipation. For Afro-Curaçaoans land was a symbol of one's personal identity. People would be identified by the land on which they lived.⁶ They would often refer to the piece of land where they were born as part of their identity. Interviewees would for example say 'Mi lombrishi ta derá na Dain' (My navel is buried in Dain (Daniel)), thus symbolically referring to the place in which one was born and grew up.⁷ Others would say: 'Mi ta hende di Sabaneta' (I am a person of Savaneta), 'Mi ta hende di Montaña' (I am a person of Montaña) or 'Mi ta mucha di Otrobanda' (I am a child of Otrobanda) etc – the last ('mucha') expressing an emotional relationship with one's place of birth.

The desire among Afro-Curaçaoans to own land was addressed in their oral tradition. The following part of a Nanzi story, for example, reveals three themes: 1) land is an important subject, 2) Nanzi acknowledges the power of the authorities – in this case of shon Arei – in the distribution of land, and 3) he sees land as a solution to his impoverished position:

One day Nanzi and his wife had no food to feed themselves and their nine children. Nanzi knew all kinds of tricks and he decided to go to shon Arei (master king) to see how he could wheedle a piece of land out of him. He went to the king's palace and said: Oh good master king, you are very powerful and generous. You alone can help me. I am as poor as a church mouse. I have to look after my wife and nine innocent creatures. I am running out of money. Shon Arei, for God's sake, improve my lot, give me a piece of ground so that I may plant something (Baart 1983:101; Wood 1972:48).

As the story continues Nanzi again uses his notorious wits to acquire a piece of land. He asks shon Arei for a piece as big as a cow's hide, to which shon Arei agrees. Nanzi then buys a cowskin and at home cuts it into thirty narrow strips. Following this, he, his wife Shi Maria and daughter Pegasaja select a good piece of land. The next day Nanzi leaves home with a long rope made of this cowskin to mark out the area. The king is surprised by the size of the land but eventually concedes that once again Nanzi has managed to outwit him.⁸

In reality it was not quite so easy to acquire a piece of land. Several factors constrained the land available to free Afro-Curaçaoans. For a long time the decision about whether a person could attain a plot was in the hands of the former slave-masters, together with the ruling class. As noted in Chapter V, those who continued living on the plantations in the paga tera system remained dependent on the whims of the owners. However, the process of leaving the plantation was hindered not only by limited economic opportunities and the poor ecological environment, but also by several regulations and laws. Only those without plantation work had a chance of renting a piece of land from the government.⁹ If one already had work and a place to live on a plantation, permission would be refused.

Those under this category would be considered 'wanting to act on one's own' or 'trying to become too independent'. This motivation for a refusal once again indicates that the State and the plantation owners shared common values, determining their relationship and interactions with the black population. Upon receiving a petition, the relevant district master would inquire as to whether the plantation owners in the surrounding area had any objections against handing out the requested land. Any objection would result in the petition being turned down. This regulation was applied both in the eastern and western districts. This happened, for example, to Mathias Apostel, who in 1874 requested a piece of government land south of plantation Sint Joris, where he worked and lived, for agricultural purposes and to build a house. The district master turned down the request because he considered Apostel's wish to live on his own an indication of him wanting to detach himself from the plantation where he lived. The district master was also against the working class acquiring large parcels of land close to plantations.¹⁰

Clementina Loop's request in 1876 for a piece of government land on *Montaña di Rei* to build a straw hut with kitchen and a corn storage for her and her children was also turned down on these grounds. The district master's argument was that the petitioner already possessed a spacious home on the plantation of Jan Zoutvat, where she had been living for a long time.¹¹ This practice of control persisted in the western part of the island into the twentieth century.

Sometimes petitioners disagreeing with the refusal would openly show their discontent. Such was the case in 1864, when a group of former enslaved and free people living on

plantation Engelenberg in Banda Bou petitioned for a piece of land. Their request to settle on the government ground called Pannekoek was granted. However, this decision met with a hostile reaction from the plantation owners, who feared an overcrowding in the locality. When the district master wanted to withdraw his decision based on this objection, the spokesperson of the group came forward and claimed 'that they had submitted their petition with due respect for the authorities, but if the granted permit were to be withdrawn, they would move away, even leaving the country as they no longer had to comply with the wishes of the plantation owners'. Subsequently, they were given the piece of land.¹² In most cases, however, plantation owners succeeded in curbing the independence of former slaves, sometimes with the law on their side.

Land issues seldom took the form of overt rebellion against plantation owners and State authorities. Apart from stressing their lawful rights, Afro-Curaçaoans undermined those in authority in various ways on a daily basis. For example, in the report of 1864 by the master of the third district to the Procurator of the King regarding harvest and animal husbandry, he reported that part of the plantations' harvest was lost due to workers having been too busy working their own land, having refused to work for others, or having worked very slowly.¹³

While the plantation owners were against freedmen leaving the plantation, for the black working class it meant 'sali for di bou di pia di shon' (coming out from under the feet of the shon). Some acknowledged that they had become tired of always having to bow their heads for the shons ('Baha kabes pa shon'). Indeed, over time, an increasing number of people wanted to be free of the shon and rent a piece of land from the government.

The finance administrator for the colony of Curaçao stated in a letter to all district masters dated 29 May 1885 that the petitions by plantation labourers for renting or buying land had increased.¹⁴ In an article written fourteen years later the same administrator looked back and argued that in that way the black population wanted to free itself from this state of dependence (de Veer 1899:329). Even into the twentieth century those who had stayed on the plantations would continuously use the threat to leave as a tool of resisting the power of the owner. In 1909 a plantation owner complained that his black workers were behaving in an independent manner and that he could not always get them to work. He also pointed out that at the slightest reproach on his part, they threatened to leave his plantation and rent a piece of government land instead.¹⁵

As a result of increasing pressure by the working class, around 1885 more and more land began to be distributed by the government. In order to avoid antagonizing the plantation owners, the State initially handed out land well away from the plantations.¹⁶ Later on, however, the State would buy land from owners whose plantations had become economically unviable. This was distributed to the freedmen, in order to create an independent peasantry.

Much to the anger of the plantation owners, living on government land gave people a sense of independence. In 1890 the owner of Savaneta (Savonet) complained in a letter that the State had rented out 48 pieces of land near his plantation, in Westpunt. As a result, he felt he could not let his animals graze on the land, or take material from there for burning his chalk-oven. He was also angered by the fact that people were keeping more animals than allowed. His hostile feelings, however, also stemmed from being confronted with

people who disobeyed his orders. He felt that the people in Westpunt instigated those living on his plantation. As an example he cited that when he had refused permission to dance the tambú on his land, they had danced in the middle of the public road, arguing that this was a free place for everyone.¹⁷

Savaneta was one of the most enterprising plantations on the island. It had one of the largest livestock and its average annual agricultural yield was the highest on the island, providing work for many people (Renkema 1981a:248; Spanjers 1981:10). As a result it was also one of the few plantations that did not see a transient workforce. As the following Table shows, the population increased rather than decreased over the years.

Table 7.1 Number of Inhabitants, Huts and Stone Houses on Plantation Savaneta, 1864-1899

Year	Population	Huts and Stone Houses
1864	337	80 + 29
1868	389	143 + 34
1876	408	80 + 34
1884	405	No data
1891	396	172 + 35
1899	452	138 + 32

Source: Renkema 1981a:155

However, it was also a plantation where people continually complained about the owners in oral narratives. Studies by Brenneker and Juliana, Leon Weeber (2004, on this specific plantation) and myself, contain several narratives with complaints about the autocratic behaviour of the owners. In the following part of an interview collected by Brenneker and Juliana the informant looks back on a childhood experience involving the owner. As a small child he sometimes stayed with his grandparents, who lived on Savaneta. His parents lived on free government land. When he compared this with life on the plantation he emphasized the dominance of the land owner and the way the people responded to this.

Ami tabata un mucha nasé riba Westpunt. Mi mama ta di Sabaneta. Mi tata di Westpunt. Mi tawela tabata fitó den hòfi di Sabaneta. Mi tabata e promé nietu, di un di su yunan. Un dia, mi a mira un mespel ku a kai for di palu. Ora mi ta bai kue pa bai kome e mespel mi a mira shon Harry. Nos tabata yam'é, shon Harry. Ora el a mirami ku e mespel, e di ku mi: 'Ta ki bo tin den bo man?' Mi di kuné: 'Ta un mespel mi a haña bou di palu, shon.' E di ku mi: 'Tres'é p'ami.' Ku su garoti, el a bula riba mi, saka p'aya banda. Mi a sali na kareda. Ora

I am a child born in Westpunt. My mother is from Savaneta. My father from Westpunt. My grandfather was an overseer in the orchard of Savaneta. I was the first grandchild. One day I saw a medlar (Mespilus germanica), that had fallen from the tree. When I went to eat it I saw shon Harry. We used to call him shon Harry. When he saw me with the mespel, he asked me: 'What do you have in your hand?' I told him: 'It is a mespel which I found under the tree, sir.' He told me: 'Bring it here to me.' With his cane, he jumped on me, and then sprang to the other

mi a sali na kareda, el a bentami un palu. Mi a haña un piedra i mi a bent'é un piedra. Mi a bula waya, un kareda te Westpunt. Mi a bai laga mi tawela riba Sabaneta. Anto ora su manisé, mi tawela a puntra, si mi tabata riba Westpunt. Mi mama di ku sí. Anto el a manda yamami, anto ora mi a bini. E di: 'Mi yu, ta kiko a pasabo?' Mi di, asina asina tata, pasó asina mi tabata yama mi tawela, tata. 'Bo no por a bini bin bisami?' Mi di: 'Nò tata, paso e hòmber tabata ku su garoti. M'a benta un piedra riba dje, tata. Wèl awor mi no ke pa e mirami.' E di: 'Mi yu, bo a benta e piedra?' Mi di kuné: 'Sí.' E di: 'Ai Dios.' Pasó tur hende tabatin miedu di shon. Ántes... pasó si bo bisa un kos di shon, ya tur hende ta haña doló di barika, mara sintura. Ta shon. Ami no tabatin miedu pasó mi tabata mucha. Rèspèt sí. Nunka niun hende a bisa mi wowo ta pretu, ma miedu di shon mi no tabatin, pasó m'a nase riba Westpunt. Mi ta di Westpunt. Mi mama di Sabaneta. Wèl mi no tabatin miedu di shon. El a manda bisa mi tawela, tresémi pa e batimi. Mi tawela di kuné, nò mi no ta biba den Sabaneta. Mi tawela no por hibami pa e batimi.¹⁸

side. I started to run. When I started to run, he threw a piece of wood at me. I found a stone and I threw the stone at him. Then I jumped the fence, and ran straight to Westpunt. I left my grandfather on Savaneta. The next day, my grandfather asked whether I was in Westpunt. My mother told him yes. He sent for me, and when I came, he said: 'My child, what happened to you?' I told him: 'Tata [father, because I used to call him tata]. I said: Tata, so and so happened.' 'Why didn't you come and tell me?' I said: 'No tata, because the man had his cane. I threw a stone at him. Now I don't want him to see me.' He said: 'My child, did you throw a stone at him?' I said: 'Yes.' He said: 'Oh my God.' Because everybody was afraid of the shon. Formerly when people said something about the shon, everybody would get pain in their belly and would tie their waist. Because it is the shon. I was not afraid of the shon. I had respect, of course. No one could say that my eyes are black (that I don't show respect to people), but I was not afraid of the shon, because I was born on Westpunt. I am from Westpunt. My mother was from Savaneta. Well I was not afraid of the shon. He told my grandfather to bring me so he can beat me. My grandfather told him that I did not live on Savaneta. My grandfather could not take me to him so he could beat me.

This story demonstrates the perception of levels of freedom depending on where one lived. The informant was born after emancipation. Even as a small child he was aware of the different attitudes of those living on the plantation and those living on government land. The latter had a sense of control of time, labour, one's own life and that of the family. Over time, plantation owners sensed this all-pervading notion of autonomy among the inhabitants of government land. The owner of Savaneta complained in a letter about how people from Westpunt used to sell him their dividivi beans for thirty cents, but now refused to do so as they could sell them for four times this amount to another plantation owner.¹⁹ With their new-found freedom people made good use of the existing rivalries between plantation owners.

Geertruda Alberto, also called Ma Tuda, born in 1883 in the same community as the previous informant, saw access to land outside the plantation as a means of achieving more independence from the oppressive supervision previously experienced. It gave her a greater degree of dignity and control of her own life and that of her family. She articulated this sense of control as follows:

*Mi no a traha pa shon, ni mi kasá tampoko, pasó Westpunt no ta tera di shon. Westpunt ta tera di gobièrnu. Niun hende riba e pida tereno ei no tin un shon. Tur hende ta liber!*²⁰

I did not work for the shon, neither did my husband, because Westpunt does not belong to a plantation owner. Westpunt is government land. Nobody on that piece of land has an owner. Everyone is free!

People felt that living on government land provided them with certain privileges. For example, Martili²¹ answered back to a plantation owner who had forbidden him to gather wood from his land. Martili replied by saying that he had not taken wood from his plantation, but rather from the nearby government land.²²

However, this perception of being free on government land was not entirely correct. For example, the tenants were not allowed to sell liquor on these plots. This rule affected women in particular, as they would often sell small quantities of rum (*un mushi di rom*) in calabashes (*gobi*) to make a living. They were not allowed to organize a *tambú* gathering on the land and were restricted to keeping only two donkeys and five goats to be tethered at all times. In 1870 stricter laws were introduced regarding the number of animals allowed and they had to carry an eartag. Sometimes animals would be shot if they strayed onto plantation land.²³

According to Renkema, the increased acquisition of government land led to the emergence of a peasantry farming small plots of land. This was particularly the case in the eastern countryside, where no elaborate *paga tera* system existed (1981a:156-7). In the west, where this system prevailed, relatively small plots were owned. In some cases people living on government land would make an agreement with neighbouring plantation owners about a plot for subsistence farming. For example, some people in Westpunt had a plot on Savaneta or on plantation Knip to practice agriculture; or people of the village of Willibrordus would have a piece of land on plantation Porto Mari. All of this fell under the *paga tera* system.

Related to this land issue was the common problem of obtaining water. Since most wells were located on plantations, initially there were not enough wells on government land. The previously mentioned Ma Tuda described how this affected her life when she was a small child.

*Mi mama ku mi tata ta hende di Sabaneta. Despues nos a roi tera, ei riba sabana bin biba afó. Mashá pena nos a pasa, traha trabou mashá duru. Na bo kabes bo tin di karga awa. Serka di Sabaneta tabatin un pos. Su awa ta dushi. Te'i nos a forma bibá, bai pidi pa koba un buraku pa saka awa. Pasó n' ta'tin pos, ni e shon di Sabaneta no tabata duna awa na niun hende ku no ta biba den su kunuku. Asina nos a biba, pasa trabou.*²⁴

My father and mother are from plantation Savaneta. Afterwards we marked out a piece of land and came to live outside the plantation. Life was hard. We had to work very hard. You had to carry water on your head. In the neighbourhood of Savaneta there was a well. There the water was sweet. It was there that we dug a well. Because [where we went to live] there were no wells, and the owners of the plantation of Savaneta did not give water to anyone who did not live on their plantation. So we lived a troubled life.

Government land was usually given out for a finite period of time and allocated to a certain person. The rent was determined according to the land's production potential, which also served as a form of labour control. It meant that those not working hard enough would be unable to pay the rent and were subsequently evicted. This was also applied in the opposite scenario: those with more produce than the potential of their land could be accused of theft. Thus it is not surprising that farmers were reluctant to give the district masters the correct amount of produce harvested. A commissioner of the second district mentioned this practice in an overview of the harvest of maize, beans and peanuts in his district. He assessed the shortfall by comparing the weight of the maize to the size of the cultivated field. He lamented that it was not possible to do the same for the beans, peanuts and vine fruits.²⁵

People tried to circumvent this State interference by persisting in their requests to buy a piece of land. As land owners, they would enjoy certain advantages and not fall under the restrictive State measures. But most requests were refused. Those who managed to gain ownership would often resell the land.²⁶

In the face of scarcity, land served as a primary symbol of personal identity, prestige, security and freedom. Its significance could often be interpreted from names such as *Bida Largu* (Long life), *Comfortabel* (Comfortable), *Deseo* (Wish), *Fe* (Faith), *Esperanza* (Hope) and *Paciencia* (Patience). Even the plots on plantations were given names. It is also through land that historical knowledge about families and communities was transmitted from generation to generation.

The following survey carried out in 1906, recording land rented from the State, gives an indication of land distribution by the government in the beginning of the twentieth century. The second district had by far the highest number of rented plots. There, much land had already been handed out to those freed before 1863. Following emancipation, land would continue to be distributed, unhindered by the plantation owners, this being the case in the fourth and fifth district until 1885 (Renkema 1981a:157). In the second and third district the parcels of land were small in comparison to those in the western fourth and fifth districts.

Table 7.2 Number of Plots Rented From the Government, 1906

	Second district	Third district	Fourth district	Fifth district
Number of rented plots	862	299	75	90

Source: Extract uit het Verslag onderzoek in pacht uitgegeven landgronden op Curaçao, Koloniale Verslagen 1906, bijlage O

Living on the Sabana

As was the case elsewhere in the Caribbean, freedpeople on Curaçao who were unable to rent or buy a plot of land would squat outside the plantations.²⁷ These pieces were called

sabana and were used as grazing land for the cattle of plantation owners, who had received this privilege by tradition from the Dutch West Indian Company. Following emancipation, the owners would change this privilege into a right of ownership (Renkema 1981a:144-5). Among the squatters were Afro-Curaçaoan men and women who had been refused a piece of land on the grounds that their behaviour was not considered good. They had, for example, been chased away from the plantations or from government land, or they were people wanting a plot of their own and therefore simply squatted the land where the planters grazed their animals.

This trend was not new: prior to emancipation squatters had already been living on these grazing lands. With emancipation approaching, a plantation owner urged the State to sell him the land near his plantation in order to keep this group well away. He expected much animal theft after emancipation. His request was granted.²⁸ With the increase of squatters after 1863, tension heightened, with plantation owners categorizing the squatters as thieves and lazy people. They were accused of allowing their animals to break the plantation fences so that they could eat the maize; of stealing animals from the plantations; of keeping more animals than allowed; of cutting wood to burn for charcoal; of selling liquor and stolen goods; and of keeping the detested tambú dance on their land. Over time, these complaints flared up and plantation owners directed letters to the government to take action. In 1867 for example, again two plantation owners urged the State to sell them the land near their plantation in order to keep this group away.²⁹

The master of the second district, J. Ferguson, also focused on this attitude a few weeks before freedom. He objected to the pattern of squatting and observed that more and more freedpeople were building their houses at random near public roads. He felt compelled to put forward the following advice to the colonial authorities:

The several circumstances which I have observed since accepting my present position, have led me to take the liberty to come with several proposals regarding the administration of the police in my district. The first issue regards the social life of the inhabitants and their way of settling down in this district. On both sides of the public roads, people are building houses on pieces of land. These houses are built with special permission from the government, under the strict condition that the inhabitants will not fence them and that they will not sell liquor there. But most of the time even with the greatest effort by the national police, these irregularities cannot be stopped or prevented. In view of the forthcoming emancipation, when in this district about 1,200 people will become free citizens, it would be desirable to establish villages so that they can learn the basics of moral life.³⁰

This urge to form orderly communities was also in the interest of the Church, as it would afford the priests more control of parishioners. The Church possessed land in the western countryside of Barber and Buitenbosch. It was also active in preventing people from being dispersed. For example, when a certain family tried to gain ownership of a larger plot which would displace other families living on the same land, the priest of the parish protested against this on behalf of these families. The dispersion of relatives was something to be avoided prior to emancipation.³¹

After 1863, the main institutions of society were confronted with the problem of how to continue exercising social control on the lives of Afro-Curaçaoans. A district master drew attention to the urgency of this in view of what he believed to be lacking in their character. He wrote that:

They are slow and indifferent and rarely work with the aim of improving their situation. If only they can satisfy their immediate needs they are content. Most of the time, they would steal in order to satisfy their immediate needs. This is due to them living outside of any community on the savannas. This dispersion will only stimulate lazy behaviour and theft.

According to the district master an orderly community life should be stimulated as a form of fostering civilized behaviour among the squatters. He argued that in this way:

One could not eliminate laziness and theft with all force as long as these people lived outside of any community on the savanna. They would never become civilized as they cannot be controlled properly.³²

His fear was that this cycle would be perpetuated as this behaviour of lawlessness would be copied by their children. 'Presently', he continued, 'even their young children are contaminated by this behaviour, as their parents do not set a good example.' He proposed a law aimed at knocking down all illegally built houses on the savannas. The head of each family would then receive a piece of land from the State where they could settle and form villages.

Over time, squatting on the savannas became a thorn in the side of the district masters, who would repeatedly complain about the uncontrollable agglomeration of huts.³³ The principal argument of those with power was that blacks were not equipped for freedom and that they needed some kind of external control. Encouraging them to live in a community, where the Church could play a central role and exercise better social control of their lives was the favoured solution and was supported by plantation owners. In addition, objections against these inhabitants originated from owners fearing that a group of independent peasants would arise, resulting in a loss of workers on their plantations (Renkema 1981a:144).

As far as land was concerned, the sabana were by definition of very little agricultural interest since they could barely support subsistence farming. At an earlier stage they had been left by the plantation owners who had instead chosen the land with better opportunities for cultivation. The inferiority of these plots is well expressed in the following song, in which a woman scoffs at a man who has stolen a goatskin because he does not have a farm or even a sabana.

*Domatí, bo n' tin kunuku
Domatí, bo n' tin sabana
Domatí, ai ta nada bo no tin
Domatí, pone paki kuero abou*

*Domatí, you don't have a farm
Domatí, you don't have a grassland
Domatí, oh you don't have anything at all
Domatí, put that packet of goatskin down*

In their everyday lives these *hende di den sabana* (people of the sabana) opposed to or fell short of many existing rules and regulations in society. Popularly the name 'hende di den sabana' became a synonym for a disorderly and uncivilized person. Yet some people who lived on this land would pride themselves on this. They upheld the perception that they were people who could defy those with authority. Those living in the *sabana* served as models for the former slaves who had gained freedom under the worst conditions, being left to fend for themselves.

Tera di Famia: Family Land

An important phenomenon surrounding land acquisition was that of family land. This has been much studied by scholars of the Caribbean, such as Clarke (1957), Mintz (1974), Besson (1992) and Thornburg (1990). Mintz (1974:155) characterizes the value attached to family land as an expression of westernization and of resistance to imposed socio-economic styles of life. Besson refers to this as a paradox in attitude by Afro-Caribbean peasantries. Family land is both extremely scarce and at the same time an unlimited resource. According to Besson, the preservation of family land is a response to inequality. People reacted to unequal relationships by creating and perpetuating the institution of family land (1990:202).

John Carter Thornburg defines family land as inalienable and undivided inherited land by all blood relations of the original owner. According to him, based on its inalienable nature, group-decision making structures, equal access and use by all heirs of the founding ancestor, it could be seen as an adaptive strategy to overcome the disadvantages of socio-economic conditions, such as land scarcity, determined by slavery and the plantation system (1990:1, 94).

Curaçao too knew the phenomenon of family land. Family plots were either pieces given to a slave by a benevolent master or had been bought by the people themselves. An interesting case of family land in the western part of the country was a plot purchased by a woman after she had bought the freedom of the man who she then married. After the death of her husband on 13 May 1859 at the age of 78, the land was divided among their ten children as family land. This became important family land in the west. As a result of the sense of power this land afforded them, the owners would be in constant conflict with the district master and surrounding plantation owners regarding the so-called transportation tickets: they carried more produce to sell in town than was legally allowed. They flouted the rules and kept more animals than was permitted. However, they also had status and were considered respectable by the other members of their community. The eldest member of this family was constantly requested to sign the death register as a witness when someone in the community had died, even though he could neither read nor write.³⁴

As elsewhere in the Caribbean family land was a plot shared with other co-owning family members while the individual inherited only rights of access and use, not exclusive possession. It did not recognize individual ownership. Family land entailed that the direct descendants would hold an equal share in the property, whether or not they were residing on the land. Some people did not live there, but still shared in the ownership. In these cases

they also referred to it as their piece of land (Henriquez 1969:85). The transfer of family land was extra-legal, accomplished without a will and usually without title (Thornburg 1992:94). It was mostly an oral agreement at the deathbed of the head of the family, whereby the surviving kin had to uphold the wishes of the deceased, in accordance with the tradition that one should always comply with the wishes of the dead.

One of the first people to study the phenomenon of family land on Curaçao was the lawyer E.C. Henriquez (1969). In his profession Henriquez was confronted with the legal obstacles people encountered when wanting to sell their plots of family land in the 1960s, at a time when prices were increasing. In these cases all biological descendants would claim to be entitled to the estate even though they had difficulty in proving that they descended from the original owner (Henriquez 1969:85). Being the direct descendants of enslaved people, they sometimes had problems in making a legal claim to the land, since slaves were not legally allowed to own land. This would also constitute a problem if in the past the ancestor had failed to recognize his children or in case the children were born out of wedlock. Under Dutch Civil Code, the mother also had to recognize her children so that they could claim lineage from her. As this seldom happened, many of these children could not prove their legal descent.

Thornburg (1990:94) comments that when looking at family land from a legal point of view, it is indeed thought to create conditions of uncertainty and insecurity with regards to owning and farming. However, family land held symbolic value for the people who claimed ownership and was central in identity construction. Its symbolic value for its owners is expressed in the following statement by Eduardo Tokaai, whose family land was in Banda Bou.

*Mi tata ta di Soto. Mi mama ta di Soto. Mi mama ta hende di Seru Saré. Nos akinan ta hende di Seru Saré. Bo sa Seru Saré banda di misa di Barber. Seru Saré no ta tera di gobièrnu, ta tera di famia. Nos no ta vende niun hende ku no ta famia niun pida tera.*³⁵

My father is from Soto. My grandmother is from Soto. My mother is from Seru Saré. We here, are Seru Saré people. You know, Seru Saré, close to the church of Barber. Seru Saré is not government land. It is family land. We do not sell any piece of land to anybody who does not belong to our family.

Agriculture: Life's Sustenance

Arable farming was one way for Afro-Curaçaoans to make a living. The term *kome di tera* (to eat from the land), indicates a bond with the land as a food-providing entity. After emancipation, millet continued to be the primary crop. Clearing, planting, weeding and harvesting the millet were important aspects of farming and determined people's daily lives.

Cultivating arable land began after the rainy season in September. Labour was primarily sourced from members of the household. If additional labour was required workers could be brought in, being paid in cash or a reciprocal arrangement was made.³⁶ In the ideal situation, with a male present, he presided over the course of agricultural work.

Women and children would participate in all phases. The division of labour during planting was as follows: a man walked along a line and at each step dug a hole with his hoe, while the woman and children followed and dropped millet and pumpkin seeds as well as beans into the holes. The number and composition of the household determined how much land could be cultivated.

The following statement gives an example of how working the land controlled the day's schedule and shows the role all household members played in this:

Mi tata tabata bai drumi den mondi³⁷ grandi, ora nan tabata rosa pida tera pa planta. Ora e ta bai traha kunuku, e ta bai drumi einan. Mainta ku promé kanto di para, nos ta lanta. Tempu ku papa ta'a tini kunuku, nos tabata yuda papa planta, yena buraku. Tata ta koba buraku i nos ta buta un sinku pipita di maishi, un di patia, un di pampuna (Cucurbita maxima), i dos bonchi aden.³⁸

My father used to go to sleep in the bushes, when the land had to be cleared for planting. When he would work the land, he would go and sleep there. In the morning with the first birds, we would wake up. When my father worked the land, we would help him with planting by throwing seeds into the holes. Father would dig the holes and we would drop in them about five seeds of maize, one seed of the watermelon and one of the pumpkin (Cucurbita maxima) and two beans.

The process of planting was called *traha kunuku* (to work the land). *Traha*, in this context 'to work', indicates the amount of effort undertaken in clearing the land for planting. 'Traha kunuku' had a stronger meaning than 'tene kunuku', a term referring to the possession of a piece of land.

It is clear that agricultural work was not restricted to males. In households without a male head of the family, women would usually perform tasks typically performed by males and clear the land themselves.³⁹ This was also the case, for example, if the male was working abroad or in town. If funds were available a man might be hired to dig the holes. Maria Martina married Antersijn, born in 1910, recalled that when she was a little girl her mother used to pay a man sixty cents per day to work her land after her husband had left to work in Aruba. In this case, her mother sold the crop surplus. The hired worker had to be someone with a good knowledge of planting, to ensure a successful crop which could be sold in town.⁴⁰

With respect to tools, most farmers only owned a hoe. This was a simple tool identical in design to the one their forefathers had used during slavery and in Africa. Instruments like plows were rare, even on the plantations, except for Savaneta. With the hoe, the workers broke and aerated the soil (*drecha tera*), dug holes one foot apart – they gauged the distance using their own foot – into which they dropped different types of seed. Into one hole the millet and pumpkin seeds were dropped together with beans. This multi-cropping technique served as a type of soil management but was criticized by agriculturalists brought in from the Netherlands in the beginning of the twentieth century. They considered this method of planting chaotic and unbeneficial and added that even white planters had adopted this method. This shows that cultural contact between those dominating and those subjugated was not always one-way and top-down. The agriculturalists gave

recommendations on improving planting methods.⁴¹ However, as they described other aspects of life of the lower class in a negative sense, they were criticized by the Roman Catholic clergy.⁴²

Some elderly Afro-Curaçaoans stated in conversations that by planting in this manner, the most fertile land – where the earth was cold (*tera frieu*) – could be best utilized. While the millet would grow tall, the bean twines would wrap themselves around the stalks and the pumpkins or melon plants would trail across the ground. Other crops planted were peanuts and sometimes sweet potatoes. One could plant peanuts in November and harvest the fruits within three months. Peanuts were an important ingredient for the *mangusa*, a meal also consisting of beans and millet. In the beginning of the twentieth century peanuts were sold for twenty cents a liter and they were eaten boiled or roasted as a snack. They were also an important ingredient for sweet cakes, a delicacy sold in small shops (Benjamins en Snelleman 1914-1917:26).

Millet was a challenging crop to grow. The farmer was faced with different problems, requiring a great deal of time and energy. Marijke Steegstra in her book *Resilient Rituals* (2004) on the function of millet in rituals, quotes the Ghanian scholar C.K. Ayi (1966), who remarks that ‘although millet is superior dietetically to maize, it is a more uncertain crop for it is difficult to protect from birds and shows small returns for more bulk and labour’ (2004:176). This was also the case for Curaçao. Great care was necessary for the plants to survive until harvest time. While growing, the millet had to be hoed and protected from insects, pests, weeds and, towards the end, birds, which could damage an entire crop. In March or April the millet would be harvested.

The seasonal rhythm of a farmer’s life was determined by the succession of tasks regarding the cultivation of millet. The division of time was based on the following farming calendar:

Table 7.3 Calendar Organized Around Cultivating Millet

Month	Activities
June	Dry season (<i>drecha kunuku</i>). Clearing and breaking the piece of land of the kunuku with a hoe.
July	Dry season (<i>drecha kunuku</i>). Clearing and breaking the piece of land of the kunuku with a hoe.
August	August rains. Most planters would not begin to plant with this rain, as it would not always last, resulting in the new plants being scorched by the sun.
September	September rain, the true rain for planting.
October	Planting millet, climbing-beans, pumpkins, peanuts.
November	Weeding and taking care of the kunuku.
December	The millet grows. The struggle against insects, worms, mosquitoes and <i>Ustilago</i> . ⁴³
January	Ensuring that the millet stalks do not drop. Chasing away the birds.
February	Ensuring that the millet stalks do not drop. Chasing away the birds.
March	Harvesting the millet and storing it.

April	Harvesting the millet and storing it.
May	The remaining millet stalks with leaves are left to dry in the field, after which they are cut, stacked and saved (or sold) as food for animals.

Source: Benjamins, 1914-1917:457 and oral interviews

Farmers were at the mercy of nature and constantly faced the fact that natural circumstances were not always favourable for arable farming. Even those who criticized Afro-Curaçaoans for being lazy, had to admit that when the natural conditions were favourable, the desire for planting was sufficiently powerful to dispel this notion. One of the people interviewed by the aforementioned Commission preparing for emancipation stated: 'The freed black people are a real cancer on the colony. Those who hire them cannot rely on them. When they are most needed, for instance when it starts raining, which is the best moment for field labour, they throw away their hoe to go and cultivate their own land' (Staatscommissie 1856:229).

In 1911 this attitude was again the focus of attention. A district master stressed in a letter to the governor that this behaviour occurred mostly during the rainy period. In 1914 another district master complained that during a rainy year there was a lack of labourers on the plantations as they were working their own land.⁴⁴ There seems to have been continuous tension between working the plantation owner's or your own land first. This attitude was rationalized and affirmed in the following proverb: 'Plantadó di: promé awa ta awa' (The planter says: the first rain is the best rain). Also the expression 'Tera ta ranka' (The land is pulling) reveals a traditional view on land and is used to describe the urge for planting crops when natural circumstances are favourable.

In a year with sufficient rain people were sometimes able to harvest enough food for humans and animals for the next couple of years. However, drought was a recurring phenomenon, resulting in no harvest at all.⁴⁵ After a year of drought, people would often request the district masters to postpone their land rent, which was sometimes granted. The aforementioned government survey of 1906 on land rented from the State also gives an insight into the way tenants paid their rent. It reveals that in the second district the number of tenants not paying rent was high (about 17.5 per cent), followed by 13.4 per cent in the third district, 8.9 per cent in the fifth and lowest in the fourth district, where 2.6 per cent failed to pay. As noted before, the second district comprised the largest number of plots distributed by the government before and after emancipation. However, this was usually virgin land and required much more work before crops could be planted (*Koloniaal Verslag* 1907:23).

According to the agriculturist Fiedrich Went, people complained that the half hectare of land usually issued by the government yielded an insignificant harvest. Plots had to be at least eight hectares in order to yield a harvest that would provide a comfortable living. Due to this, and the fact that the second district was situated near town, in most cases the men would take additional jobs in town in order to supplement their income (Went 1902:48).

Renkema has revealed the correlation between drought and migration. He noted that the number of people emigrating in search of work would increase dramatically after a drought year. They would move to countries such as Venezuela, Colombia, Costa Rica, Santo Domingo and Suriname.⁴⁶

The shortage of water was also a matter of concern for the colonial government. At the beginning of the twentieth century several measures were introduced to address this problem. One such measure was the building of subsidized dams (Duyfjes 1914:226), which began in 1905. These dams formed reservoirs to retain water for the dry season. Some planters down river of the dams complained that in doing so the government had severely reduced the water flowing into their land.⁴⁷

Another course of action was the introduction of different varieties of millet, with a shorter growing time and requiring less labour and rain, such as the *maishi di shete siman* (seven-week millet) and the *maishi rabu* (millet with a tail), which was mostly planted in Aruba.⁴⁸ As part of governmental policy experimental fields of maize were planted, with some of these varieties receiving popular names such as *Kabes Largu* (Long head), *Santa Marta*, *Pichi Be* (Pietje Beker), *Carabagno*, *Maishi Rabu* and *Broomcorn* (KV 1910:28).

In a drought-prone island such as Curaçao, successfully harvesting the millet demonstrated that one had been able to transcend all natural challenges. The harvest was celebrated with much festive joy. It was a celebration of work, showing that all the hard work had paid off. This coincides with the proverb ‘Na mangasina di vruminga nunca no ta falta kuminda’ (In the warehouse where the ant stores its millet, there is no lack of food). It was also a community celebration. Harvesting work was reciprocal. Extended family members and neighbours would come and lend each other a hand (*duna un man*). There was a kind of reciprocal labour rotation which assured people that when the time came for harvesting their own land, there would be others willing to help, based on the idea of ‘Awe ta p’ami, mañan ta p’abo’ (Today is for me, tomorrow is for you).

Harvesting the millet took place in three phases. During the first phase, in the morning, the millet was cut. At sunrise men and women would gather in the *kunuku*. The men would cut the millet while the women would collect the crop and put it in a container or basket (*dakwe*). Music was a very important part of this process and the workers would sing songs to energize themselves. During this first phase the cow horn was blown rhythmically to call the labourers to work and set the pace of their collective efforts. This is similar to what Roger Abrahams describes as the ceremony of corn shucking in the United States (1992:84-5). On Curaçao the group cutting the millet synchronized their movements, thus creating regular sounds which were incorporated into the music. The impromptu lyrics varied from those with a religious content – thanking God for the harvest – to those with more secular themes, describing different aspects of life.

The second phase of the harvest celebration revolved around storing the millet. Now the workers would proceed to the storage place, the *mangasina*, to the rhythm of the drum, cow horn and the piece of plough called the *agan*. Apart from instruments and songs, this phase was also accompanied by performances. In one of the acts two men dressed as rivaling bulls – one representing an old bull, the other a younger one – would fight each other, ending with one being symbolically killed.⁴⁹ Sometimes there were also stick-fights. These performances, based on the agility of males in particular, also represented the vying for power and authority between the young and the old males. Here emphasis was placed on male dominance. Rogers notes that this tradition of topical play is evident throughout the United States and the Caribbean (1994:110).

In the third and final phase the work was finished and people gathered at the home of the organizers to dance and sing to the rhythm of the drum. Now the ceremony reached its climax. This was called *Seú será*. The music and the songs resembled those of the tambú. This heated component of the seú celebration met with much criticism by those with power. Because of its association with the tambú, priests would advise against this part of the harvest celebration.⁵⁰ Most probably due to these objections, in the beginning of the twentieth century an unsuccessful attempt was made to criminalize this celebration, when one of the district masters sent a letter to the priest in the eastern part of the island stating that those engaged in the celebration, as well as the owner of the land, should be prosecuted by law.⁵¹

As stated, a good millet harvest meant food for a few years. Very often rural people would relate that when food was scarce, it affected people in town earlier, as those in the kunuku could fall back on the stored millet. Thus millet came to symbolize abundance. However, in case of a long-standing drought even those in the countryside would suffer food shortages and start eating the seeds reserved for planting. Whenever there was a harvest surplus, this would be used along with other commodities as barter for material goods or services. This could for instance serve as payment for the services of a midwife or for the person who laid out the dead.

Agricultural work was combined with other forms of work. Often people would follow many different occupations in a lifetime. Written documents reveal that people would report a certain type of work in one year and another in the next. When comparing the land contracts in the fourth and fifth districts at the end of the nineteenth century with the death certificates of the same people, they appeared to have been registered differently with regard to their professions. The Colonial Report of 1903 also indicates that it is difficult to determine the professions of people. Someone would mention one day that he was a farmer, but the next day put forward another type of employment, depending on the work available at the time.

From the aforementioned survey of 1906 I have attempted to gain an insight into the number of people stating that they made their living as farmers (see Table 7.4). This reveals that the highest percentage of those dedicating themselves to agriculture was 79 per cent (in the eastern part of the island). The lowest is 57 per cent, in the district nearer to town. Apparently those living near Willemstad relied more on urban labour – whether this reflected their preference for urban over rural labour or rather the lack of rural opportunities is a question still difficult to answer.

Table 7.4 Cultivation of Government Land, 1906

	Second district	Third district	Fourth district	Fifth district	Total land
Total number of tenants	862	299	75	90	1326
Total land planted with millet	681	172	50	64	976
Total uncultivated land	181	137	25	26	371
Land uncultivated compared to total number of tenants	21.00%	45.82%	33.33%	31.11%	27.98%
The amount of land planted with millet compared to total number of tenants	79.00%	57.53%	78.67%	71.11%	73.60%

Source: Extract uit het Verslag onderzoek in pacht uitgegeven landgronden op Curaçao, Koloniale Verslagen 1906, bijlage O.

Fishing as an Alternative

An alternative to working the land in order to make an independent living was the fishing trade, also practiced by Afro-Curaçaoans during slavery. However, in his report of 1868, van Dissel concluded that fishing was regarded as being of little importance to the inhabitants of Curaçao. Men fished simply in small dug-out canoes in the harbour or in the bays, catching very little. He considered fishermen low on the social ladder. Due to their hard work, they were old and sick before their time. Unless they had family to support them, they often became a burden to the government (van Dissel 1868:433-4).

Early in the twentieth century Jan Boeke, assistant biologist at the Dutch national institute for maritime research, on the instigation of the colonial government made an overview of the fishing culture and a study of the possibilities of setting up a fishing industry in the West-Indies, also in Curaçao (1907-1919).⁵² Boeke's findings shed light on the fishing methods at the time and the names given locally to the fish, which he then compared to those in the region. He concluded that fishing was an underdeveloped economic sector. Boeke's study was continued by Dr. P.J. van Breemen in 1909, who also gave recommendations on developing a local fishing industry.⁵³

From these reports it is clear that a group of people – again their number would fluctuate annually – would earn money from fishing. This was, however, not easy due to the hardships faced as a result of their primitive dug-out canoes and techniques. Especially those fishing in the waterways belonging to plantation owners had a hard time complying with often arbitrary rules. Written documents and interviews show that among older fishermen there was a continuous power struggle with plantation owners for access to the sea

from their grounds. There were other problems as well. For example, the owners of the plantations of San Nicolas, Klein and Groot Sint Marta, asked the district master to be vigilant in the waterways as they accused the fishermen of stealing their salt ready to be shipped and of opening the estuary of their salt-pans without asking their permission, in order to place their nets.⁵⁴

Fishermen coming from the fishing communities of the island avoided these problems by remaining in the waterways near their villages. There were very few such villages, all having been established before emancipation and consisting mostly of freedpeople, who had adopted fishing as their major occupation. In the main these villages were situated in the western part of the island, the most important ones being Westpunt and Boca Sami.⁵⁵ The latter, inhabited by the offspring of a Dutch soldier and freedwomen, was for long characterized by its close-knit family relationships, its own form of Papiamentu and a sense of community excluding others not belonging to the in-group of the community.

The aforementioned researchers stated that fishing relied on traditional methods. Most of the equipment, such as the canoes and nets, were made by the men themselves. One method involved casting a net onto a school of fish from the shore or in shallow waters. In this case evening fishing was preferable, as then one could see a school of fish as it glittered in the water. The other method entailed standing on a rock with a fishing rod. This was mostly done on the northern side of the island, where there were plenty of fish in a relatively calm sea. These techniques were mostly an individual undertaking.

Another method was net fishing at sea, usually involving more than one person – sometimes several family members – with a more diversified labour division. People would fish from boats, with a captain and two or three crew on board. As the men would bring their fish to shore, they would sing *kantika di bua kanao* (songs to beach the boat); bystanders would also lend a hand, a phenomenon familiar in the Caribbean (Price 1966:1374). The captain was the owner of the boat and of the fishing nets and was therefore called the *doño di reda*. There was thus a hierarchy among these fishermen. The *doño di reda* would receive the largest share of the catch, while those without their own floating nets⁵⁶ would get a smaller share (van Dissel 1868:443-4). In conversation with elderly people, they stated that in this way a group of middle class families emerged through fishery. They were able to give their children a good education.⁵⁷

Fishermen were aware of the insecure basis of this way of living, as also indicated by the proverb ‘Tur dia ta dia di piska, pero no ta tur dia ta dia di kohe’ (It is everyday fishing day, but not catching day). Besides the uncertainties of whether or not one would be able to catch any fish, the seas were dangerous. Fishing boats could be dragged by currents out to sea and as most fishermen could not swim, falling overboard could be fatal. The many risks fishermen were faced with on the water were recounted in their stories, such as this one:

Un piskadó mester tin mashá tinu, tin tantu kos ku ta pasa riba laman. Un piskadó ta muri pa su bobo. E ta muri na laman pa su bobo. Ku e boto bira bok'abou..., ku e kos ei bira bok'abou òf yena ku awa, bo no por bai lag'é. Ku bo bai

A fisherman must be very alert, as much can happen at sea. A fisherman can die because of his stupidity. He can die at sea for his stupidity. If the boat turns over..., or fills up with water, you must not leave it. If you leave the boat, you

laga e boto ei, bo ta muri. Na e tantu mia [for di kosta] kaminda e boto a bira [bòltu], pa bo landa fo'i djaya bin kue tera, bo no por. Bo ta muri. Ta p'esei ora e boto bira bok'abou, bo ta tene n'e boto. Por pasa un bapor, ken ku pasa bo ta haña un yudansa, bo ta skapa. Bo mester tene n'e boto, pasó e boto ei t'e ta bo bida. Pasó laman n' ta pordoná. Laman n' ta pordoná.⁵⁸

are dead. Because from where the boat has turned over, you cannot swim to the shore. You will die. That is why when the boat turns over you have to hold onto the boat. Maybe another boat can pass by, whoever passes by can help you, and you will be saved. You have to hold onto the boat, because it is the boat which is your life. For the sea does not forgive. The sea does not forgive.

The insecurities surrounding the actual fishing also applied to the sale of the fish. This was mostly done by women. Women had the task of going around selling the fish in baskets while shouting *piska fresku* (fresh fish). Sometimes they would first fry the fish and then walk the long distance to town to sell them. This was an uncertain business, as people did not always have money to buy fish. Or sometimes they would buy on tick but never pay.⁵⁹ Fishermen often fell back on other professions in order to escape this insecurity. They would become sailors, work in town as dockmen or emigrate, depending on the labour opportunities available at the time (Boeke 1907:64).

Work Opportunities in Town

As previously mentioned, there was a growing tendency to not depend solely on a subsistence income but to participate in the wage economy, either on the plantations or in town, where labour opportunities were broader and one could earn more than in the countryside. The urge to go to town and search for employment ('Bai Punda pa buska un bida') was strong in both men and women. Following emancipation, this type of rural-urban migration became a common phenomenon. In April 1864 one of the district masters in the western part of the island reported that he had learnt by word of mouth from several planters in his district that the recently freed were leaving the plantations to settle outside their district or go to town.⁶⁰ As a result, planters did their utmost to prevent people from leaving. Those living under the *paga tera* system were hindered in looking for work elsewhere. But in the long term, the wages of thirty cents and a litre of maize per day were insufficient to pay for food, clothing and other necessities. If one wanted to go and work in town, a special permit from the plantation owner was required, as is shown in the following case:

Tempu mi tabata chikitu mi tabata serka mi tawela. Mi tionan ta traha den kunuku di Sabaneta. Nan ta bini Punda bin buska trabou. Promé ku nan sali Sabaneta, shon ta eksigí ku nan ta tuma un papel, anto ta hiba e papel serka shon Wilmu na Punda. Anto nan no por keda mas ku dos siman. Asina yega dos siman nan tin ku bai bèk. Nan tin ku tuma un papel serka shon Wilmu pa hib'é Sabaneta. Si nan yega Sabaneta i nan no tin e papel ei, nan no

When I was a little boy I was staying at my grandfather's. My uncles worked the land at Savaneta. They would go to town (to Punda) to look for work. Before they left Savaneta, the land owner required that they took with them a paper to give it to shon Wilmu in town. And they were not allowed to stay for more than two weeks. After these two weeks they had to go back. They had to get a paper from shon Wilmu and take that to Savaneta. If they arrived at

por drenta. Mi tabatin un tio ku yama Jan. E tempu ei mi tabatin seis aña. A sosodé ku el a bini Punda, bin traha na Punda. Dia ku e tabata bai bèk el a bai sin tuma papel. Tabata tempu di shon Jaco, no tabata tempu di Harry. Shon Jaco, e tata, a puntra mi tio pa papel. Tio di ku el a lubidá di tuma papel. Shon Jaco di ku e no por drenta. E di: Si mi no por drenta mi ta bolbe bai Punda. El a bin traha na Punda. Despues el a bai Venezuela. El a keda Venezuela ayá, hopi tempu.⁶¹

Savaneta without that paper, they were denied access. I had an uncle called John. At the time I was six years old. It so happened, that he went to town to work there. The day he was going back he forgot to take the paper with him. At that time we had shon Jaco, not Harry. Shon Jaco, the father, asked my uncle for the paper. Uncle said that he forgot to get the paper. Shon Jaco said that he was not allowed access. Then my uncle said: if I cannot get in, I will go back to town. He went to work in town, in Punda. Afterwards he went to Venezuela. He stayed there for a long time.

Some people from Banda Riba worked in town during the day and used their land solely as a place to live (*Koloniaal Verslag* 1907:23). Naturally, town provided different opportunities from the countryside. Men, for example, repaired boats, transported people in ferry-boats, loaded and unloaded ships (Irus 1910:57).

Both Otrobanda and Punda fostered the development of an artisan class with small businesses as blacksmiths, shoemakers, carpenters and tailors. In town young boys were able to learn a trade by becoming apprentices to craftsmen. Fine carpentry by skilled local carpenters was sought after at the time.⁶² The furniture was sold both on the local market and abroad. Locally they were made for members of the higher class, although the lower class would also acquire furniture – albeit of lesser quality – when getting married (Nije-Statius van Eps 1995).

In the late nineteenth century, as steamships began to replace sailing vessels, Curaçao became an important coal refuelling station for coal-powered ships. Due to the protected and safe harbour, commerce and seafaring became increasingly important. Men would carry baskets of coal on their shoulders; for each basket they were given a *locha* (token) which would later be exchanged for money. Every year around a thousand ships, carrying provisions from the Netherlands, would use the island's harbour. The following description comes from Didi Sluis, who in the beginning of the twentieth century worked in the harbour:

E trabou di Klep ta un trabou di bestia e ta'ta. Un trabou duru. Tin biaha, mi ta saka 200, tin biaha 250 makutu pa dia. Bo tin ku yena 100 makutu pa 1 florin. Subi trapí, yena krenwa, pusha krenwa, basha karbon. Bo pia ta kumin-sá slep. Bo n' por bai mas. E krenwa ta bira di banda, pero bo n' por basha karbon. Si bo basha, kla b'a keda. Bai kas bai kas. Ta kla bo ta. Ta yen di mucha ta sintá ta warda.

Harbour work is like animal work. Very hard work. Sometimes I would fill 200, 250 baskets a day. One had to fill 100 baskets to get 1 guilder. You had to climb the stairs, fill the wheelbarrow, push the wheelbarrow, and throw out the coal. You will feel like losing your footing. You will get tired. The wheelbarrow turns over, but you cannot lose any charcoal. If that happens, you are lost. They will tell you to go home. There are many boys, just sitting and waiting for a job.

This also shows that work in town was not always as favourable as people moving from the country had imagined. The Roman Catholic Church did not stimulate the migration to

town using the problems one was likely to encounter there as a deterrent.⁶⁴ People from the kunuku were also aware of the negative aspects of working in town. The lack of accommodation was a great problem, but also for example the presence of uncontrolled prostitution and the related venereal diseases, ironically called *malu di muhé* (sickness of women).

When comparing life in town to the kunuku an informant stated 'Parti di kunuku tabatin mas rêspet ku parti di Punda' (In the kunuku people had more respect than in town).⁶⁵ Respectful in this sense implies being subservient. The change of character some people would undergo in town was both admired and disdained. An informant from the kunuku remembered how her brother, who had been working and living in town, would bend a tambú gathering to his will and start singing improvised songs upon his return home at the end of each year. She recalled that the text of the particular song portrayed a self-image of someone defying any form of interference and oppression. This was also the image people in town and emigrants liked to portray of themselves, to emphasize a behaviour distinguishing them from those in the kunuku.

*Mi mama ta lisiinbein
anto mi tata skòrpion
anto mi mes ta araña di pinda
Nos ta pika mata unbe.*⁶⁶

*My mother is a centipede
and my father a scorpion
and I myself a stinging spider
We sting and kill immediately.*

Migration

Due to poverty young men in particular would emigrate to look for work.⁶⁷ Some praised this choice:

*Si bo sinta na kas, bo no ta gana nada, pasó'
Dios ta parti bendishon tur dia. Bo ta sintá den
kas, bo ta keha ku bo tin hamber, bo no tin tra-
bou... Dios ta parti bendishon. Bo mester ta
eifó pa bo haña bendishon, pa bo haña trabou.*⁶⁸

*If you stay home, you will not receive anything,
because God shares blessings every day. You are
sitting at home, complaining that you are hun-
gry, and you don't have any work... God shares
blessings outside. If you are outside, you will get
blessings, to get a job.*

Following emancipation, people from the Caribbean islands, including many from Curaçao, constituted the labour force for countries in the region in need of seasonal or temporary workers (Alofs and Dalhuisen 1997:157). Those recently freed, with neither access to land or prospects were often the focus of agents sent by companies from abroad to procure cheap labour.⁶⁹ The Latin-American rail network was one such destination for these workers. Afro-Caribbeans living in extreme poverty were eager to leave their country and create a better life for themselves. In 1872, for example, 399 Curaçaoans left to become labourers in the construction of the railway in Costa Rica (Römer 1977:48). Ten years later it was the construction of the Panama Canal that attracted poor black workers from Curaçao. In 1882, 46 men left to become part of the 130,000 strong labour force from the

English Caribbean working on the Panama Canal (Newton 1984:123-9). The following year 62 Curaçaoans left to work in Santo Domingo, mainly as cane cutters. In the beginning of the twentieth century some workers also left to Suriname and to St. Eustatius.⁷⁰

Work opportunities in Cuba stimulated a massive migration of male Curaçaoan labourers. This exodus has been studied by Paula (1973) and Allen (2001a). Never before had Curaçaoans emigrated in such large numbers, despite economic conditions in the host country not always being favourable. It is estimated that at the time around fifty per cent of the male labour population emigrated to work in the cane fields on Cuba (Römer 1977). There they were joined by a great number of people from the English Caribbean, Haïti, Puerto Rico and some from the Dutch Windward Islands. The transfer of labour from Curaçao to Cuba started in 1917. The exodus came to its peak in 1919, when at least 1,900 men left Curaçao to work for the *colonias* belonging to the Chaparra Sugar Company and the Manati Sugar Company.⁷¹

Studies on intra-Caribbean migrations from Curaçao have mainly focused on the underlying economic push and pull factors.⁷² Fraser sees the migration culture of the region as a kind of resistance: 'people voted with their feet'. Those leaving their home countries clearly showed their dissatisfaction with the circumstances in which they lived (Palmer 1990:26). Economic factors indeed motivated the emigration of people from Curaçao. People left the island in search of work, while in some cases the migration proved financially successful with some black families being able to buy land with the money they had earned abroad. But the experience of migration went beyond the economic level. By emigrating, they also aspired to a higher social status.

These migrations were intended to be circular and not permanent. Sometimes, however, 'temporary' separations would last a lifetime, with the inherent consequences for mothers, wives and partners. The tension experienced during departure is expressed in the following song:

<i>Mi ta bai mi ta bai mi ta bai ku shon</i>	<i>I am going with the master</i>
<i>Ta ken lo mira mi mama bieu?</i>	<i>But who would look after my old mother?</i>
<i>Demarara ta un tera leu</i>	<i>Demerara is a far land</i>
<i>M'a puntra mi tata, mi tata n' sa di dje</i>	<i>I asked my father,</i>
<i>M'a puntra mi mama, mi mama n' sa di dje</i>	<i>I have asked my mother</i>
<i>Mi ta bai mi ta bai ku shon</i>	<i>But she does not know of it</i>
<i>Ta ken lo mira mi mama bieu?</i> ⁷³	<i>But who would look after my old mother?</i>

Those remaining behind often lived from hand to mouth in extreme poverty. The following song also deals with the abandonment of women. The informant related this song to the emigration of men to Cuba, but looking at the text it could have dealt with any type of emigration, at the time taking place to countries such as Panama, Venezuela and Santo Domingo. The following stanza expresses abandonment. The woman reflects on the departure of her lover, who had not even told her that he was leaving.

*Ai m'a subi un seru
 Ai m'a mira un barku
 Rosa a bin bisami
 ku mi dalia ta na bordo
 Hisa bela
 Hisa bela
 hisa bela bo bai.⁷⁴*

*I climbed a tree
 I saw a boat
 Rosa came and told me
 that my lover was on board
 Set the sail
 Set the sail
 set the sail and go*

The following narrative also displays this abandonment:

Mi tata a bai Cuba ora mi tabatin tres aña. Mi tata i mama tabata kasá na rat i na misa. Pero tòg el'a bai Cuba ku un otro muhé, ku kende e tabatin un yu ku tabata 11 luna mas yòn ku mi. Mi mama a keda atras e so. E no tabata manda sèn pa mi. Mi mama a traha pa kuida nos. Ta den tempu ku muhénan tabata traha sombré di kabana, ku nan tabata bende ku Arabir. Mi mama tabata traha sombré. Mi tabata biba ku mayornan di mi mama. Nan tabata yuda i kuida nos. Un parti di e plaka ku mi mama tabata gana ku trahamentu di sombré, e tabata hunga sam kuné. Un muhé den bario tabata hunga sam. Ku e sèn di sam ku e haña ora ta tok'é, e tabata kumpra paña i sapatu. Pa medio di e plaka di sam ei mes, mi mama a haña sèn pa lagami risibí. Dia mi tata a bini bèk for di Cuba na 1927, tabata 8 aña despues ku mi a risibí mi promé santa komunion.⁷⁵

My father left for Cuba when I was three. He and my mother were married both by Church and by law. Yet he left to Cuba with another woman with whom he had a child 11 months younger than I. My mother was left alone. He did not send us any money either. My mother worked to take care of us. It was during the time that women used to make straw hats which they sold to Arab merchants. My mother used to make hats. We lived with my mother's parents. They would also help to take care of us. With part of the money my mother earned through making hats she would play sam. A lady in my neighbourhood used to run the sam. With the money she would receive from the sam, when it was her turn, she would buy clothes and shoes. It was in this way that my mother received money for me to do my first communion. When my father came back from Cuba in 1927, eight years later, I had already done my first communion.

This story gives some evidence of how women survived by playing sam. It is a traditional saving system in which a few people would participate by putting some money into a communal pot when paid. Each member in rotation receives the total amount in the pot, as agreed upon at the beginning. This would be coordinated by a person named *kabes di sam*.

The Role of Women in Material Life

The lives of women were hard. In the kunuku and on the plantations they were involved in the fieldwork. Although women would often carry out the same tasks as men, they were paid half the wage of men. Apart from work on the land, there was the possibility of working for the government authorities. They would, for example, carry water to male labourers repairing the roads. Many women had to combine their work with caring for their chil-

dren and tending livestock. Mixed-farming was common practice, both on private land and under the *paga tera* system. Most households had a few chickens and sometimes some pigs. Goats in particular were considered a good investment; in the words of Fernando Henriques: 'the poor man's moneybox' (1953:24). The sale of a goat would help towards paying the land rent. Or one could sell a goat in case of a funeral or to cover marriage expenses.⁷⁶

Women were also involved in the daily domestic chores, such as looking after the children, cleaning and preparing food. The major task in preparing meals was processing the millet. Before cooking the millet, it took some time to separate the wheat from the chaff. Following this it was ground in the *metate* or pounded in the tree-trunk mortar. Whilst doing so, women would sing songs. By singing about their daily lives they could transcend the difficulties they experienced. An informant underlined this by stating that when she sang, she would forget her problems and life would seem bearable again. She sang the following song while pounding millet, the so-called *kantika di bati maishi*.⁷⁷

*Ai Dios, ta trabou di mata hende
esakinan.
Mi ta bai kunuku, eeh.
Mi sí n' ta bini Punda mas.*⁷⁸

*Oh Lord, it is work to kill people
this work.
I will go to the countryside, eeh.
I will never come to town again.*

In rural communities in particular, women were responsible for economic activities outside the village. They, for example, determined the price of the harvest surplus and sold it. Women would travel long distances on foot or on a donkey along roads in a bad state of repair⁷⁹ to sell the crop surplus and to purchase supplies, such as brown sugar (*suku di klenku*) and flour. The previously mentioned Ma Tuda from the most western part of the island, used to walk from Westpunt to town⁸⁰ to sell the produce from her land. She described the hardships involved:

*E pianan aki a kana kaminda di Punda. Ten mi
tabata mucha i despues ku mi a kasa, ta'a
meskos. Mi ta bai Punda ku karga riba mi
kabes. Un makutu yen di webu i kònkòmber.
Mi ta traha kunuku, kue kònkòmber, patia,
buta den makutu, buta riba kabes. Tin biaha
áwaseru ta batibo na kaminda, muha bo paña
papa papa. Ora awa pasa, bo tin ku ki'è, tros'è
i bolbe bisti mesun paña.*⁸¹

*These feet did walk to town, you know. When I
was a young girl I would do that and after I
married it was the same. I would go to town
with a load on my head. A basket full of eggs
and cucumbers. I would work on the land, reap
cucumber, watermelon, place them in a basket
and put that on my head. On your way to town
it would sometimes rain, then you got soaking
wet. When it stopped raining, you had to take
off your clothes, wring them out, and put them
on again.*

She related that after her husband died she also took on his workload; Ma Tuda continued to go to town to sell her products. After having been able to buy a donkey she reached town much faster so she could go there twice a week instead of once every two weeks.

Mi mes ta traha kunuku. Mi ta hòmbèr i mi ta muhé tambe. Mi ta traha, kue patia, kue komkomber, yena nan na makutu, pone nan riba buriku, bai Punda. Mi tabata bai Punda, dos biaha pa siman. Esei hende di ántes tabata hasi. Traha ku sodó di nan frenta pa nan biba.⁸²

I worked the land myself. I am a man and woman at the same time. I would work, reap squash, cucumber, fill my baskets, place them on the donkey and go to town. I would go twice a week to town. That is what people in the past used to do. To work from the sweat of their brow to earn a living.

It was a common phenomenon that neighbours would pool their money and appoint someone to do a bulk shop in town, a phenomenon known as *shèr*. The appointed woman would receive a list of items to be purchased. According to Rupert, mostly they were trusted and respected women in the community. They had to be good negotiators to successfully deal with the merchants in town (Rupert 1999:76; Clemencia 1996:82).

People farming in the eastern part of the island planted fruit and vegetables, such as okra, perpetual spinach, string beans, calabash gourds, Curaçaoan cucumbers and pumpkins to be sold in town. Some of these farmers had wells and windmills.⁸³ Rupert states that from the eighteenth until the beginning of the twentieth century Afro-Curaçaoan women often peddled their merchandise in the streets of Willemstad. They would sell sweets and other tasty food products, which they carried in a large basket on their heads while calling out what they were selling.⁸⁴

Many women were involved in other activities providing an income (*rende bida*).⁸⁵ Many studies mention the weaving of panama hats as an opportunity to earn a stable income.⁸⁶ The production of these straw hats depended on the prevailing fashion and therefore fluctuated over the years. After having fallen in the 1880s, the trade rose again by the end of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century it became an important export product popular in Europe, the United States, Barbados, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Guadeloupe and Venezuela. In schools set up by the Roman Catholic Church young girls were taught the skill of weaving hats.⁸⁷ The cooperative of agriculture also gave courses to women, who then instructed others in the countryside how to improve their hat-making skills.⁸⁸ The hat weaving trade introduced a new workpattern for women. They could stay at home and look after their children while weaving the hats. In the kunuku women were thus no longer obliged to work on the salt-pans⁸⁹ or to do other arduous work after the planting and harvesting of millet was finished. Girls would learn to weave hats at an early age and in that way helped with family finances. Especially in difficult times young girls would stay at home rather than attend school in order to help their mothers weave hats. Other, more enterprising women would pay a third person to do part of the work while they would finish the hat themselves.⁹⁰

There were three types of hats: the fine hats or *sombré fini*, the medium fine hat (*sombré medio fini*) and the rough hat, *sombré brutu*. The *sombré brutu* was worn while working on the land. An experienced hat maker would take two days to weave a hat; the less experienced up to seven days. Women complained about the amount of work required for weaving a hat and the physical strain involved: 'M'a traha sombré te mi dedenan a bira un banda' (I wove hats until my fingers became crooked). But they had the chance to increase their income by working faster and producing better quality hats.⁹¹

Most hats made on Curaçao were rough hats, locally called *sombré gròf*, *sombré parotin* or *sombré di Arabí*. The last name stemmed from Syrian and Lebanese peddlers arriving on the island at the end of the nineteenth century, known under the generic name of *Arabí*. They collected these hats for selling. Maura Pieternella, born in the second district on 30 November 1907, remembered how her mother used to negotiate (*negoshá*) with these Libanese peddlers over the price of her hats to ensure a good deal. Her father was a sailor and would spend little time at home. She also relates her involvement as a small girl in this economic activity.

R.A.: *Señora a bisa tambe ku señora a traha sombré komo mucha?*

M.P.: *Hopi. Tabata mi bida. Señora konosé Eliya Arabí? E tabata biba na Penstraat. E tin negoshi na Penstraat. Negoshi di kabana. Anto mi mama ta tuma un par di kabana serka dje i partié pa nos, pa mi ku mi ruman Ogenia. 12 kabes di kabana pa nos bai traha. Nos ta yuda otro. Den un siman nos ta kaba e sombrénan pa djaweps ora Eliya ta bini djaweps bini tuma su sombré. Den kareda di 10.00 or, nos ta kla.*

R.A.: *Kantu sèn señora ta haña?*

M.P.: *E sèn no ta mashá. Kada sombré ta 10 plaka (10 x 2 sèn i mei, ta 25 sèn) pa un. Kasi pòrnada bo ta traha.⁹²*

R.A.: *Madam, you told me that you wove hats when you were a little girl?*

M.P.: *Very much. That was my life. Do you know Eliya, the Arab man who used to live in Penstraat [near Willemstad]? He had a business in Penstraat. A business in straw. And my mother used to take some straw from him, for me and my sister Ogenia. 12 pieces of straw to weave hats. We would help each other. In a week, we would be finished with the hats, so that when the Arab Eliya came on Thursday to fetch his hats, about 10 o'clock in the morning, we would be finished.*

R.A.: *How much did you earn?*

M.P.: *The money was not much. For each hat we would get 25 cents. Next to nothing.*

Women would also wash and iron clothes for wealthy families. In 1900, 11 per cent of the female population was registered as washerwomen, while in 1910 this decreased to 7 per cent. This was an arduous task as the clothes were washed by hand. The process depended on the fabric. Sometimes the clothes were boiled to get the dirt out. White clothes were bleached and spread out in a field. At the time most clothes were starched. Afterwards they had to be ironed. Some women ironed exclusively. Ironing was very labour intensive, especially before 1934, when it involved the use of charcoal irons. Sometimes a woman had to burn the charcoal first, which required knowledge of the type of trees to use and the amount of time required for the charcoal burning process. The charcoal irons would be filled with hot coals to heat up the base. The holes in the back of these irons regulated the circulation of air to keep the embers burning. The irons were placed on a fire and had to be heated periodically when used.

An 83 year old informant who was interviewed in the late 1980s, recalled that as a young girl she would be sent out to iron clothes. She started work at eight o'clock in the morning and would finish at midnight. She focused on male clothes, as she could charge up to two guilders for a suit, far more than for a dress. She stated that 'Ta paña di hòmber ta'a yudami konopá i kinipi' (The ironing of men's clothes helped me make ends meet).⁹³

Women also worked as *yaya*'s for the coloured and white elite families in town. In this way some managed to escape poverty, like the nanny I interviewed who had left in 1913 to work for a Jewish family in Cuba. There she earned forty dollars per month – much more than the five guilders she could earn on the island as a nanny and far more than she could get for weaving hats. She had to leave her only child behind, but sent her money and goods. Interviews with some of these former nannies reveal that their work would sometimes involve several families.⁹⁴ This was something in which they took great pride, such as is apparent in the following account:

C.K.: *Despues ku mi mama a muri, m'a bai Punda. Mi tabata yaya di yu. M'a mira nietu di Shon Leyba. M'a mira Doctor Capriles su nietunan. Mi a keda kada un di e lugánan ei 6 aña. Mi ta keda na trabou, mi no sa bini kunuku. De bes en kuando mi ta bini kunuku pa mira mi tata.*

E.J.: *Kuantu ta'a gana?*

C.K.: *Tres heldu pa luna. Ma por a biba. Bo ta haña tur kos di kumpra.*

E.J.: *Tabata haña kuminda?*

C.K.: *Sí, ku kuminda.*⁹⁵

C.K.: *After my mother died, I went to work in Punda. I was a nanny. I was a nanny for the grandchildren of shon Leyba. I also looked after the grandchildren of Doctor Capriles. I stayed six years at each of those places. Sometimes I would go to the countryside to visit my father.*

E.J.: *How much did you earn?*

C.K.: *Three guilders per month but you could live. You could buy everything.*

E.J.: *Did you get food?*

C.K.: *Yes, with food.*

Römer (1976) considers these nannies a link between western and African culture and as such they represent keyfigures in the creolization process in Curaçaoan society. Nannies played an important role as transmitters of Afro-Curaçaoan cultural elements. They were very close to the children in their care as they would look after them all day and at night sleep beside their beds on the floor. In this role, they were able to pass on cultural elements and values which differed from the 'white' environment in which the children lived. They told them Nanzi stories because these could transcend class and ethnic barriers, and as such these oral traditions achieved the status of collective property for the ruling class and the subjugated alike.

Some women talked about their experiences as a *yaya* with much pride. An informant stated that she had enjoyed being a *yaya*, as this involved her in all matters regarding the children ('Ora bo ta *yaya* bo ta den tur kos'; when you are a *yaya* you are in everything). She attended all parties with the family and was dressed according to the latest fashion. Due to their close relation to the employer, nannies tended to look down on the other servants. *Yaya*'s returning from abroad with their employers assumed an air of importance. Witteveen's most recent study on *yaya*'s (2006), however, shows that their situation was not as rosy as it may have seemed. In particular those who had given up the work, as they had been unable to abide by the rules, would openly reveal the negative aspects. They had little time to themselves and had to be at the family's beck and call, day and night. Others claimed in retrospect that they had had to sacrifice their private lives, having remained unmarried and childless in order to keep the job.

Another type of work was carried out by the *menchi*: a woman employed to breastfeed a child, mostly of elite families. The following account comes from a lady whose mother was a *menchi* for a plantation owner.

Tempu mi mama a hañami, esei ta mi mama a kontami, un di e shonnan a haña un yu hòmber, nan a yam'é Frank. No ku mi konos'é, bo sa, e shonnan no ta buska hende manera mi pa konosé komo ruman di lechi. Mi mama tabata duna e Frank ei, kri'é ku mi lechi. Anto mama no por kome nada pa e yu ei no haña mal di barika. E shon a eksigí di mi mama, un pechu ta pa mi, un pechu ta pa e shon. Tempu di katibu, no. Tempu di katibu, no. Ami ta yam'é asina pasó awor akí ta kua hende ta bai tuma e kos ei? Tur eseinan... Ora nan a eksigí mi mama asina, mi mama di nò, anto e yu tin ku muri. Ku e no por bebe kaminda mi yu ta bebe, mi no ta dun'é. Anto nan a ens, pasó e shon no ta duna niun yu lechi. Anto e ora ei mama a sigui dun'é lechi.⁹⁶

When my mother gave birth to me, she told me that one of the plantation owners had given birth to a son. His name was Frank. I don't know him, you know, the owners do not need someone like me to be recognized as their milk-sibling. My mother used to breastfeed him with my milk. And mother was not allowed to eat anything so that the child would not get stomach problems. The owner demanded that one breast be mine, and the other one his son's. Slavery time, slavery time. I call it so, because nowadays nobody would accept that. All that... When the owner demanded that of my mother, she said no, then your child will have to die. If he cannot drink at the same breast as my child does, I am not giving him any milk. Then they agreed, because the shon does not breastfeed any of her children. Then my mother continued to give him milk.

Some women, both in town and in the countryside, had the opportunity to open small shops and thus become entrepreneurs. They would sell products such as flour, sugar, biscuits and coffee, which had become popular. Sometimes women in town would act as intermediaries for farmers wishing to sell their produce, as was the case with fifty year old Carolina, who agreed to sell milk in town for the land owner Cohen Henriquez – she was paid ten per cent of the sale price.⁹⁷ In town, for example, women would chop meat for people in shops or would carry people's faeces in buckets to dispose of in the sea.

The notion of autonomy that this afforded was related in an interview with a woman born in 1900 who had owned a small shop in Otrobanda. Here she explains her desire to work for herself:

Mi n' bai traha pa niun hende pasombra mi n' ta wanta niun hende hasi abusu di mi. Mi ta traha riba mi mes. Mi mama a siñami traha tur kos. Traha bolo, tur kos el a siñami. Despues el a siñami kose. M'a siña kose. Mi a kumpra un mashin di kose.⁹⁸

I have not gone to work for anybody because I cannot bear people taking advantage of me. I work on my own. My mother taught me to do everything. To bake, everything she taught me. Afterwards she taught me to sew. I learned to sew. I bought a sewing machine.

It was not easy to accurately establish the number of female shop owners at the beginning of the twentieth century. I attempted to deduce this from an article in the newspaper

La Cruz in 1918 listing shop owners in the kunuku who besides common goods sold cigarettes.

Table 7.5 Overview of Shopkeepers in the Kunuku

	Name	Place	Geographical position on the island
1	Bechi Laurends	Westpunt	Banda Bou
2	Bernardo Matheu	Kas Abou	Banda Bou
3	Djerri Helmeyer	Willibrordu	Banda Bou
4	Julus Helmeyer	Mahuma	Middle of the island
5	Evelina Willem	Kamina Nobo	Middle of the island
6	Anita de Lanoy	Seru Fortuna	Middle of the island
7	Maria Jansen	Bou di Barber	Banda Bou
8	Shon Walle	Sta Rosa	Banda Riba
9	Catalina Merkis	Montana	Banda Riba
10	Pablo Ruiz	Sta Maria	Middle of the island

Source: *La Cruz*, December 1918

The names indicate that about fifty per cent of these shops were owned by women. However, this gives only a rough indication as it concerns shops where one could buy cigarettes, a new product on the market. It is probable that these were the more enterprising shopkeepers.

Some of these women were also known to sell alcohol, sometimes without a permit and thus illegally (Rutten 1989:47). In 1863, for example, Elba Naar was accused of selling alcohol to some policemen on plantation Barber. She was, however, able to avoid prosecution by telling the authorities that she had only offered the men some drinks free of charge as they were nice people who did their job diligently.⁹⁹ Women were also primarily responsible for organizing dances with an admittance fee, an illegal activity. In 1901 all seven people who were fined for organizing a dance party in a public place without permission, were women (Koloniale Verslagen 1903).

In addition, women had the opportunity to become teaching assistants for the nuns who taught the children at school. These teaching assistants were young, lower class women, who had been instructed by the Roman Catholic Church. They received some education in reading and writing and had to live a respectable life. Any rumours or gossip about them could lead to their dismissal.

Finally, through midwifery women could earn a stable income. In 1874 a large group of traditional midwives from all over the island were given a legal permit to offer midwifery services.¹⁰⁰ Most of these women had acquired their knowledge and skills from family members, often during slavery. They were respected by the community they served. In 1995 I was able to interview a ninety year old woman from a long line of midwives on the

island. Her great-grandmother, who had also been a midwife, was the daughter of a midwife called Bachilie Antonia Ignacio in Buitenbosch (the eastern part of the island). In a letter dated 3 May 1868 the district master petitioned the government to give Bachilie some financial support because of the help she had offered both during and after childbirth to many slaves and freedwomen of the poorer class.¹⁰¹

Conclusion

In this Chapter I looked at how Afro-Curaçaoans managed to survive economically. The recurring economic difficulties of the island with its ecological challenges made life for most Afro-Curaçaoans a real struggle and this group remained economically very vulnerable. The constant search for a livelihood is captured by the Papiamentu term 'buska bida', through which Afro-Curaçaoans defined their situation. The term implies a creative action, which also typifies the economic life of this group. On the practical level buska bida manifested itself in resistance to and confrontation against land owners, district masters and sometimes even Roman Catholic priests, as well as in negotiation with these authorities.

This search for a livelihood involved a constant search for land, for food and for wage labour by both men and women. Those who remained on plantations complained about the control exercised by the owners. It was not the unpaid work for the plantation owners they resented, but rather that they had to, when natural circumstances were favourable (principally during the rainy season), pay attention to the land of the owner before they could tend their own. The intrusion in their private life, with domination extending over their children, generated much more antagonism than the Church's involvement in their lives. A reason for this may be that, as we have seen, the Church also worked in helping out people in need.

Attaining a piece of land helped people to become in a sense autonomous. Land had an enormous significance for Afro-Curaçaoans, in the extreme form manifested in the symbolic attitude of reverence towards what was called 'tera di famia' (family land). Some people were able to practice agriculture or fishing and could in that way participate in an autonomous subsistence economy, usually on the basis of their traditional knowledge and skills. Sometimes, in periods of drought, they had to turn to local plantation owners for work in order to survive. There was a continuous urge for self-reliance expressed in the tendency to leave the countryside and move to town. Sometimes this was part of an internal migration flow, which later turned into an external one, with many men leaving the island in search of work.

Both those in town and in the countryside undertook all types of activities and services in demand at the time, some of which do not appear in the statistics. Next to more regular jobs such as dockworker, nanny, washerwoman, ironer and seamstress, people would, for example, use their knowledge of medicinal herbs to cure people, lay out the deceased, perform as singers or musicians, or carry the faeces of people to the sea. In that way men as well as women were active in supporting the household, be it by working for a salary, by bartering or by carrying out reciprocal land labour services.

In dealing with these economical challenges, Afro-Curaçaoans created the hybrid conditions of their own ways of life. Here economics were not the only aspect that mattered. Some freedpeople, who did not hold any social position in regular society, were able to assume positions of leadership within their communities and were greatly respected because of the creativity and perseverance they invested in organizing their lives after slavery.

Notes

- 1 The word 'kunuku' refers to a plot of land where crops are planted and to rural areas outside town.
- 2 *La Cruz*, 24-6-1914.
- 3 Interview Altagracia Regina (granddaughter of Ma Yaya Felipa, born 2-5-1910), Brenneker, 20-1-1983 (T 87, Fundashon Biblioteka Públiko Kòrsou).
- 4 Interview Louis Lourens (born 1879, Willemstad), Brenneker, 1959 (Zikinzá-collection, T 524, NatAr).
- 5 Broek 1990. Between 1920 and 1935 the Afro-Curaçaoan authors Willem Eligio Kroon, Manuel Antonio Fraai and Simon Miguel Suriel wrote short stories in *La Union*, aimed at morally instructing Afro-Curaçaoans.
- 6 Johannes Martes Kasiano from Plantation Blauw, for example, who was stabbed on Christmas Eve 1870, was also known as Johannes di Blauw (NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Rol van Strafzaken 1878, Procesverbaal no. 24).
- 7 After the birth of a child a deep hole was dug in the mother's yard, in which the umbilical cord and afterbirth were buried. Interview Nana Demalia (born 1873, Seru di Mahuma), Brenneker/Juliana, 1959, (Zikinzá-collection, T 474, NatAr).
- 8 Land as an object of wealth is also present in one of the four earliest published Nanzi stories, in 1899. In the story *Kompa Nanzi i e pòpchi di breu* (Nanzi and the tar doll), Nanzi goes out to steal fruit for his hungry family on the estate of the king, which has all types of tropical fruits in abundance. *Cuenta di Nansi* 1899:104-6.
- 9 NA, Ministerie van Koloniën, 1850-1900, inv. no. 6739,23-8-1864/554.
- 10 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 2e district, inv. no. 132, 12-10-1874/40 and 4-12-1874/49. However, this case also reveals that the governor did not see the words of the district master as final: he asked him in another letter to elaborate on the objections against Apostel, to which the district master complied.
- 11 Similar reactions were given to petitions of other people (NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 2e district, inv. no. 133, 20-6-1876/48, 18-10-1876/86).
- 12 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, inv. no. 126, 6-8-1864/83 and 20-8-1864/86; inv. no. 35, Beschikking Gouvernement van Curaçao en onderhorigheden, 23-8-1864/554. The district master made this decision in an attempt to stop people from dispersing.
- 13 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 3e district, inv. no. 139, 14-4-1864/49.
- 14 NA, Ministerie van Koloniën, 1850-1900, inv. no. 6783, 29-5-1885/281. See letter finance administrator to governor, 14-5-1892/212, 150 (NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Administratie van Financiën, 1892, inv. no. 37).
- 15 Minutes meeting of Society of Agriculturists, 24-11-1909 (*Koloniaal Verslag* 1910).
- 16 NA, Ministerie van Koloniën, 1850-1900, inv. no. 6783, 29-5-1885/281. See also letter finance administrator to governor, 14-5-1892, no. 212/50 in which he explicitly states this problem (NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Administratie van Financiën, 1892, inv. no. 37).

- 17 NA, Ministerie van Koloniën, Gouvernementsjournaal van Curaçao, 1890-1891, inv. no. 6788, 27-2-1890/128.
- 18 Interview Brenneker/Juliana, probably 1958 or 1959, as most of the interviews were done in those years. (Zikinzá-collection, T 34, NatAr). Unfortunately no age or name of the male informant was registered. Nevertheless I have chosen to include this due to its vivid description of plantation life.
- 19 NA, Ministerie van Koloniën, Gouvernementsjournaal van Curaçao, 1890-1891, inv. no. 6788, 27-2-1890/128. The finance administrator stated in this letter to the governor that before emancipation freed blacks had had the unwritten right to settle on the 'Savaan Westpunt' to build homes and practice agriculture. This right was hereditary but according to the administrator the situation was getting out of hand (NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Administratie van Financiën, 1892, inv. no. 37, 14-5-1892/212).
- 20 Interview Geertruda Alberto, also called Ma Tuda (born 1883), Allen, 30-8-1983 (NatAr).
- 21 The plantation owner referred to him as 'certain Martili from Savaan Bulumonte'.
- 22 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Districtbeheer. Ingekomen stukken 2e en 3e district, inv. no. 102, 9-12-1909.
- 23 Renkema 1981a:157; NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 4e district, inv. no. 151, 27-2-1890/128.
- 24 Interview Geertruda Alberto (Ma Tuda) (born 1883), Allen, 3-8-1983 (NatAr).
- 25 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 2e district, inv. no 131, 26-4-1864/28.
- 26 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, inv. no. 125, 23-5-1863/5. See also NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Administratie van Financiën, 1892, inv. no. 37, 16-12-1895/162.
- 27 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken, 3e district, 1863-1906, inv. no. 139, 26-4-1864/56. According to the commissioner of the third district also in his district people were cultivating land without legal proof or permit.
- 28 NA, Ministerie van Koloniën, 1850-1900, inv. no. 6734, 31-12-1862/906.
- 29 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, inv. no. 127, 3 -10-1867/143. See also Koloniale Verslagen 1910 [KITLV]:. under the heading 'animal husbandry' this phenomenon was also described.
- 30 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 2e district, inv. no. 131, 16-5-1863/3.
- 31 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, inv. no. 125, 23-5-1863/5.
- 32 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 3 district, no. 140, 5-3-1866/9.
- 33 See letter district master to deputy Procuror General (NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, 1863-1904, inv. no 126, 26-4-1866/45).
- 34 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, inv. no. 126, 22-12-1865/137; inv. no. 127, 27-4-1866/46 and 25-3-1867/48.
- 35 Interview Eduardo Tokaai (born 1899), Allen, 12-9-1984 (NatAr).
- 36 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 2e en 3e district, inv. no. 168 20-2-1912/44.
- 37 The *mondi* is an area of wild growth, with a small variety of trees, such as watapana, brasil wood and *kibra hacha* trees. The *mondi* is also important for food gathering. One may find here fruit of the cactus *milon di seru* (Melocactus), the *infrou* (Opuntia werntiana), the *datu* (Lemairece-reus griseus), the *kadushi* (Cereus repandus), the *karawara* (Cordia alba R. et Sch.) and the *mari-pompun* (Omphalophthalmum rubum karst). As well as a provider of food, the forest is also recognized as a place where particular supernatural beings are said to dwell, also known as *spiritu*.
- 38 Interview Simon Bonifacio (born 1908) and Clemence Bonifacio (born 1907), Allen/F. Muizenberg, 9-5-1989 (NatAr).
- 39 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 2e en 3e district, inv. no. 168 20-2-1912/44. See also interview Maria Antersijn-Martina (born 1910), Allen, 29-5-1992 (NatAr).
- 40 Interview Maria Antersijn-Martina (born 1910), Allen, 29-5-1992 (NatAr).

- 41 Went 1902 (Appendix V, KV 1902, p. 46); Rijkens 1907; Kakebeeke 1912.
- 42 See *La Cruz*, 28-1-1903 (a comment on the report written by Went).
- 43 Ustilago is a kind of fungi which causes harm to the millet.
- 44 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 2e en 3e district, inv. no. 169, 18-5-1914, no. 140.
- 45 Spanjers (1981:6-7) states that between 1830 and 1982 – except 11 years, when no measurement of rain was taken – the average rainfall was 575 mm. In the period 1830-1914 the average rainfall was 574.1 mm. The period of this study, 1863-1917, saw 28 years with a rainfall below average.
- 46 Renkema 1981a:361-3; van Soest 1977:20; Koot 1979:44, 54; Dekker 1982:98; Pietersz 1985.
- 47 *Koloniaal Verslag* 1912 . The importance of these dams in society is manifested in the saying ‘Traha dam, warda awa’ (Building a dam to save water), meaning it is necessary to save when the possibility arises.
- 48 Benjamins, 1914-1917:457; *Koloniaal Verslag* 1908. This type could already be harvested in January, the other one not until March or April. However, people complained that the *maishi rabu* could easily be destroyed by worms.
- 49 Pencheon (2000) states that the bull play of St. Kitts is a folk drama representing a true incident which occurred around 1917 at the Belmont sugar plantation. No information has been received on whether the bull play in Curaçao was based on a true incident. However, in some oral narratives bulls were mentioned as terrors of the plantations and some informants recalled how people were killed by enraged bulls. Also cows were used to deter naughty children. Pencheon also states that in West-African culture the cowhead figure represents strength, power and authority.
- 50 *La Union*, 3-4-1890.
- 51 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Minuten van uitgaande stukken 2e district, inv. no. 190, 23-3-1927.
- 52 Boeke was sent to the Caribbean for nine months by the minister of Colonies (Weber 1921:215).
- 53 Van Breemen 1909a en b.
- 54 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, inv. no. 126, 1-9-1867/90.
- 55 Van Breemen 1909b.
- 56 A ‘reda’ is a fishing net with cork floats and weighted at the bottom with lead or stone.
- 57 Interview Emil Paulo (born 1890), Allen, 23-8-1983 (NatAr). Paulo was an important *doño di reda* in Westpunt.
- 58 Interview Carlitu Martina (born 1905), Brenneker/Juliana, 25-4-1984 (T 101, Fundashon Biblioteka Públika Kòrsou).
- 59 Interview Emil Paulo (born 1890), Allen, 23-8-1983 (NatAr).
- 60 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, inv. no. 125, 13-4-1864/21.
- 61 Interview Brenneker/Juliana, probably 1958 or 1959, as most of the interviews were done in those years. (Zikinzá-collection, T 34, NatAr). Unfortunately no age or name of the male informant was registered. Nevertheless I have chosen to include this due to its vivid description of plantation life.
- 62 Rijkens 1907; Römer 1977:43. The *Curaçaoese Courant* of 24-3-1888 published an announcement of the owner of a furniture factory in Puerto Rico looking for skilled fine carpenters to come and work in Puerto Rico. This announcement re-appeared six times in the newspaper. It shows a willingness to employ these workers abroad but the number of times the ad appeared seems to indicate that at the time carpenters were reluctant to leave.
- 63 Interview Didi Sluis (born 1904), Allen, 15-5-1984 (NatAr).
- 64 In 1905 the Church dedicated a series of eight stories to a man who went to town to work: *La Cruz*, 18-1-1905, 25-1-1905, 1-2-1905, 8-2-1905, 15-2-1905, 22-2-1905, 29-3-1905 and 5-4-1905. The man was unsatisfied with his life in the kunuku and wanted to go and live in town. The fact that so many stories were told relating to this subject showed that the Church was against this urban migration. Town was seen as a place where trouble prevailed.

- 65 Interview B. Kirindongo (born 1924), Allen, 2-2-2000 (NatAr).
- 66 Interview Lucita Emanuel (born 1909), Allen, 16-5-1989 (NatAr).
- 67 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 2e en 3e district, inv. no. 169, 18-5-1914/140.
- 68 Interview Lorenzo Fernando (born 1902), Brenneker/Juliana, 31-10-1985 (T 114, Fundashon Biblioteka Públiko Kòrsou).
- 69 Soon after emancipation people started leaving the country. On 9-7-1863 a labour agreement was made between 25 freedpeople and a Venezuelan employer to work in Venezuela. On 10-7-1863 and 16-7-1863 agreements were made with 25 Curaçaoan men to sail the river in Venezuela with lighters in order to transport products (NatAr, Notariële protocollen, 9-7-1863, Not. Akte, Inv. 53, no.151; Notariële protocollen, 10-7-1863, Not. Akte, Inv. 53, no.155; Notariële protocollen, 17-7-1863, Not. Akte Inv. 53, 159).
- 70 Van Soest 1977:20; Koot 1979:44, 54; Dekker 1982:98; Pietersz 1985.
- 71 After Cuba was struck by the sugar crisis in 1921 a large number of Curaçaoans returned. The Curaçaoan-Cuban migration of cane workers consisted essentially of working-class males. Most women remained at home. Some were driven into extreme poverty, surviving on a meagre income derived from weaving straw hats (Allen 1992).
- 72 Van Soest 1977:20; Koot 1979:44, 54; Dekker 1982:98; Pieters 1985.
- 73 Interview Cai Maduro (date of birth not registered), Brenneker/Juliana, 1959 (Zikinzá-collection, T 704, NatAr).
- 74 Oral History Project in preparation of the documentary 'Bosnan skondi' (Hidden Voices) by Jeanne Henriquez and Rose Mary Allen, July 1992, Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology of the Netherlands Antilles and Centre for the Development of Women (SEDA). See also interview Mathilda Francisca (date of birth not registered, Santa Martha Grandi, Banda Bou), Brenneker/Juliana (undated interview; Zikinzá-collection, T 231, NatAr).
- 75 Interview Imelda Valerianus (born 1915), Allen, 6-6-1992 (NatAr).
- 76 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 2e district, inv. no. 138, 7-4-1903/54 and Brievenboeken 2e en 3e district inv. no. 168, 20-2-1912/44.
- 77 Songs were named after the activities performed. The songs for pounding millet were sung while rhythmically pounding the millet in the tree-trunk mortar. There were also songs for grinding millet in the *metate* called *kantika di mula maishi*. And there were songs to accompany the pounding of cactus (*kadushi*) with the mortar called *tati*: *kantika di tati* (songs to pound cactus).
- 78 Interview Isabel Valks (born 1906), Allen, 13-3-1984 (NatAr).
- 79 The *Amigoe* (5-5-1886) published an overview of the poor condition of the roads, particularly in the western part of the island. The road from Savaneta to Westpunt was very bad, as was the one from Lagun via Knip to Westpunt. On Santa Martha all roads to the north were impassable. The road from Porto Mari to Ascencion was full of holes. The one from Salina to Klein Fontein and over the hill of Sebastiaan could not be passed by cart, and a pedestrian found no space to give way to a cart.
- 80 According to van Kol (1901) this walk took around fourteen hours.
- 81 Interview Geertruda Alberto (Ma Tuda), (born 1883), Allen, 30-8-1983 (NatAr).
- 82 Interview Geertruda Alberto (Ma Tuda), (born 1883), Allen, 30-8-1983 (NatAr).
- 83 In 1919 the cooperative of agriculture subsidized the digging of wells. Previously this expense was in the hands of the farmer (NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 2e en 3e district inv. no. 168, 20-2-1912/44). Kakebeeke (1912:5) states that two of the hired plots of land in the western part of the island had a windmill, against 48 plots with windmills in the eastern part. On these plots people would plant vegetables to sell in town.
- 84 Rupert recalls a certain Ma Labertina who lived at the end of the nineteenth century/beginning twentieth century and who was also mentioned in de Pool (1935:271; Rupert 1999:60-1).
- 85 Through these activities they could make an income for the day (*saka dia*). They would also make ends meet by engaging in one activity to compensate another (*dal vla saka vla*).

- 86 Catalogus 1913; Rustige 1934; van der Veen 1984; Rupert 1999; Henriquez 2002.
- 87 Before using the raw material a woman had to clean it, strip it (take off the hard exterior) and cut the straw into strips. The type of material used depended on the type of hat. Because the straw had to remain wet as it was woven the woman continuously dampened it with a cloth soaked in lemon water. One would start with the middle part of the hat called the *rushi*. According to the particular model, there were different kinds of *rushi*. They had local names such as *rushi kokolishi*, *rushi Henriquez*, *knoopsgat* and *Pietermai*. Afterwards one would elaborate around the *rushi* in the form of a series of circles. Every time a new straw was added, this was called *kresida*. When this was finished, one made the crown (*bòl*) and the brim. The last part, called the *bor*, was done in several ways, depending on the type of hat. The amount of time it took to make a hat varied and depended on the model. After the hat was finished, it was washed with soap and allowed to bleach in the sun for a few hours. For extra whitening it was placed in a bath of sulphur during the night after which it would be placed in the sun to dry. The finer hat was given a finishing touch by ironing it or hitting it with a special hammer.
- 88 Rustige 1934; van der Veen 1984; Rupert 1999; Henriquez 2002. In 1920 the cooperative of female hat makers 'Arbeid Adelt' (Work gives honour) was founded (until 1924).
- 89 They worked the land, they loaded the salt. Their role in this was so important that it was mentioned in Catalogus 1913:59.
- 90 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Rol van Strafzaken, Criminele en Correctionele Teregtzitting 1872, Procesverbaal no. 31.
- 91 Locally these hats were given names relating to the fineness of the weave. The finer hats were also known as *Rouville*, *Nuyens* and *Gentleman*, the first two having been governors of the island. Such a hat could cost between five and twelve and a half guilders. The medium fine hats were locally known by the names *Ola*, *Kastol* and *Kompa*.
- 92 Interview Maura Pieternella (born 30-11-1907), Allen, 16-4-1996 (NatAr).
- 93 Interview Frida Streedels (83 years of age in the late 1980s), 1980 (NatAr). This (undated) interview was conducted by Sonia Garmers.
- 94 Interview Eleonora Hermes (born 1883), Allen, 14-5-1986 (NatAr).
- 95 Interview Clementina Kirindongo (born 25-10-1878), Brenneker/Juliana, 27-9-1977 (T 54, Fundashon Biblioteka Públiko di Kòrsou).
- 96 Interview Ini Sirvanie (born 1-4-1910), Allen, 27-11-1989 (NatAr).
- 97 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Rol van Strafzaken, Criminele en Correctionele Teregtzitting 5-5-1874, Procesverbaal no. 24.
- 98 Interview Maria (who refused to reveal her family name, born 1900), Allen, 22-9-1988 (NatAr).
- 99 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 5e district, inv. no. 125, 18-9-1863/53.
- 100 NA, Ministerie van Kolonien, 1850-1900, inv. no. 6747, 9-4-1874/161 (14 women were appointed), 21-4-1874/181 (21 women were appointed). In 1874 the government legalized midwifery. The names of these midwives were given by the district masters, who knew them. The letters of recommendation were sent to the members of the Medical Council.
- 101 Els Langenfeld, 2001a. See also NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 4e district, inv.61. 3-5-1868. In my conversation with this woman she informed me that many midwives had extensive knowledge of childbirth. Birthing customs were passed on from generation to generation. Midwives were knowledgeable about the use of different types of herbs during and after pregnancy. For example, during nine days following the birth, the mother should drink a concoction made of leaves from the *welensali*, *basora pretu* and *karawara blanku*-tree for the recovery of the womb and to prevent infections. She also had to take a herbal bath (*soba* or *tuma sodó*). For this, a tub was filled with the hot liquid of these leaves. The woman assumed a squatting position above the tub, allowing the hot steam to enter the womb and cleanse it. Interview Aniceta (Yeta) Albertus (born 17-5-1902 in Willibrordus), Allen, 2-9-1984 (NatAr).

