

CHAPTER IX

Tambú di bida: An Afro-Curaçaoan Concept of Life

This Chapter examines Afro-Curaçaoans' spiritual outlook on life. I am particularly interested in how Afro-Curaçaoans reflected on and conducted their lives in the context of the material and social conditions as described in Chapters VII and VIII. Some studies have approached this from the perspective of Afro-Curaçaoans' religiosity, within the context of the meaning and value systems the Roman Catholic Church introduced into their lives.¹ Most of these scholars have stated that the Church had power over Afro-Curaçaoans and that it determined how they conducted their lives.

Here, however, I would like to examine their outlook on life not only as a response to Roman Catholic beliefs and practices – and in that way as an acculturated form of Roman Catholicism – but also as a way which gives credence to their own values and moral code. Barbara Kopytoff argues that people who have been converted to other religions retain something of their traditional beliefs and combine these in various ways with the new vision of the world they are offered (1987:463). Indeed, the Afro-Curaçaoan outlook on life has also been influenced by their own or their ancestors' experience of being enslaved.

I use the term *tambú di bida*, which Brenneker and Juliana recorded during an interview with Felix Martina.² He used this concept as a metaphor for life similar in essence to the saying 'Manera tambú ta bai, sanká ta bai'. Literally: 'that the buttocks go in the way the drum beats', thus representing flexibility. It is not surprising that the interviewee equated the musical instrument of the tambú (drum) with life, since music played a primary role in the lives of Afro-Curaçaoans. But the word tambú has several additional meanings. It referred to the most important instrument of the tambú celebration held in the months around the end and the beginning of the year, as well as accompanying the *kantika di tambú*.³ The drum determined the rhythm of the dance and led the movements of the dancers. By comparing life with a tambú performance the interviewee focused on the necessity to be flexible in life.

But tambú also meant perseverance, as it was one of the traditional African customs able to persist despite the prohibition of this celebration (Rosalia 1997). During slavery the practice was forbidden by the slave-owners, as they feared the propagation of dissent and rebelliousness. It was also condemned by the Catholic clergy, who called the dance lascivious and sexually immoral. Members of the older generation still relate the severe ways in which the clergy punished those found participating in a tambú celebration. This punishment included the confiscation of the drums, whipping and even the expulsion of those participating from the Catholic Church.

René Rosalia, who studied the tambú and listed its different functions, considered it a way through which the lower class undermined the rules of those with political and economic power (1997:91-110). For him the tambú was an expression of subaltern resistance to class and racial values in society. Rosalia described the tambú as a way of life in which the enslaved – and following emancipation the workers and farm labourers – expressed their spiritual beliefs. He compared it with other manifestations in the Caribbean, such as the *calinda* of Trinidad, the *winti* of Suriname, the *palo monte* of Cuba and the *candomblé* and *macumba* of Brazil (2002:1).

But tambú was more than a form of resistance against the control of the dominating class. In a male-female relationship it was also an expression of female power. For women, participating in the tambú meant contravening what was deemed respectable behaviour, since a respectable life would have held them hidden in the privacy of their own homes. No 'respectable' woman would be expected to participate in the tambú and those who did – either by organizing it, singing, clapping their hands, dancing or merely as onlookers – were condemned and labelled bad women (Witteveen 1992:107-17). Women who performed as tambú singers (*kantadó di tambú*) moved in the public domain and went beyond the boundaries set by male-dominated society. They showed assertiveness and courage in the composition and presentation of their songs. As singers they had the ability to introduce lyrics with which they could verbally whip people.

In general, the tambú songs are characterized by the use of cunning word-play and double entendre. The lyrics were carefully thought out in order to trigger the desired response from the singers, dancers, drummers and onlookers. They commented on events that had happened during the year and which were generally disapproved of. They also referred to individuals, either from within or outside the community, who had misbehaved during the year.⁴

The tambú strengthened social cohesion among Afro-Curaçaoans of the lower class. They would gather in the yard of a house or in a public area to perform the tambú. However, some members of the white elite also participated in these celebrations, much to the disgust of the State and the Roman Catholic Church.⁵ One of these was known as the *tambú di señorita* (tambú of virgins), which Rosalia described in his thesis as a private tambú celebration for rich merchants to which Afro-Curaçaoan tambú players and young, unmarried Afro-Curaçaoan women were invited.⁶ Furthermore, people of the elite class would request tambú singers to improvise a song which insulted their rivals in tambú form.⁷ It was also generally known that they would often conclude their home parties with a tambú, while they were heavily intoxicated. The transcendence of social class barriers, resulting in the participation of the white elite class in the tambú celebration, their use of the tambú to transmit their own coded messages – even though it was surrounded by much taboo and secrecy – shows that the tambú had become creolized in one form or another. This attitude portrayed by the elite goes against Römer's understanding of creolization, which he sees as 'the westernization of Africans' and at the same time 'a less-desired Africanization of the white elite group' (Römer 1993:20). Tambú was able to transcend ethnic boundaries despite interference from those with power.

This aspect of creolization has been insufficiently covered by Rosalia, who dealt with the expression solely from the perspective of resistance. The notion of tambú as resistance

is contradicted when in the beginning of the twentieth century some plantation owners began to allow the celebration on their land. This is said to have happened on the plantations of San Juan and Savaneta (Rosalia 1997:137-9) and on Porto Mari (Allen 2001b:46). Both the anthropologist Jennie Smith (2001:54-5) and Richard Burton (1997:264) confirm that this phenomenon took place in the rest of the Caribbean. Smith studied these types of expressions in Haiti, which were also forbidden by those with power. She states that this music genre began to be accepted as the status quo, as those with power used it against their opponents and it served to take people's minds of their problems (2001:54-5).

Considering all of these characteristics of the tambú, one should bear in mind the concept of the tambú di bida when looking at how Afro-Curaçaoans perceived themselves and the reality in which they lived. 'Tambú di bida' thus reflects several paradoxical characteristics. On the one hand it meant coping with destiny, whereby life's events were seen as inescapable and irrevocable, while on the other hand it also meant people performing as active agents, taking control of their own lives. Yet they were only able to perform within the social context allowed by the dominant class. This supports the idea of a double-edged Afro-Caribbean culture, whereby opposition to dominance and living in freedom can only occur within the social parameters and boundaries set by those dominating (Burton 1997). This leads to a paradox of accepting life as an inescapable series of events versus life as a continuous challenge to come to grips with.

Afro-Curaçaoan's Cosmology

I will start by looking at the notion of 'tambú di bida' within the context of what is called cosmology in anthropology. Joy Hendry defines cosmology as the ideas and explanations of people about the world they live in and their place in the world (1999:115). Their reflection about self and their place in life is expressed in religious thought. Most expressions attest God as the Supreme Being in life. Afro-Curaçaoans referred to God as *Dio*' or *Djo*, derived from the concept *Dios*, the Christian name for God in Spanish. The terms *Waze* or *Weze*, meaning God in Guene, sound closer to African cultures. In some *seú* songs God was also referred to by the name *Shon Grandi* (Upper Master), thus drawing parallels to the power and authority of the slave-owner.⁸

God was believed to control fate and his power was evident in all aspects of life, such as the search for work, whether or not it would rain and the potential of a newly dug well. God was especially referred to in relation to food and water, essential conditions not always available to Curaçaoans. Thus it was primarily in agriculture that God's life-giving powers were felt and recognized. The proverb 'Si Dios ke e ta manda awaseru' (Everything depends on God's blessing), for example, expresses this belief (Hendrikse-Rigaud 1994:161). It was during agricultural work that Afro-Curaçaoans made most of their songs referring to God.

There were several agricultural rituals aimed at channeling divine power to attain a good harvest. After the land had been cleared and prepared and before the planting would start, a ritual would be performed asking God for permission to cultivate the land. This was done by stamping one's feet on the ground and by singing the following song, the lyrics of which are partly in Guene and partly in Papiamentu. Over the years the meaning

of some of the words has been lost, making a direct translation impossible. However, it is certain that it focuses on greeting the land before cultivating it.

<i>Simudato lag'é</i>	<i>Simudato lag'é</i>
<i>Ban kuminda tera awé</i>	<i>Let us salute the land today</i>
<i>Kumindamentu pa tera awé</i>	<i>Salutations to the land today</i>
<i>Simudato lag'é.⁹</i>	<i>Simudato lag'é</i>

After performing this ritual, the planting began. During the whole agricultural process the protection of God was requested. At harvest time, some songs also referred to God's involvement and were an expression of gratitude.¹⁰ During the first phase of planting mainly spiritual songs were sung to greet God. The song 'Shon Grandi a duna. Ta Tata di shelu a duna' (The Big Master has given. It is the Father in heaven who has given) was usually sung at the opening of the harvest celebration.¹¹

The following song was sung while picking the millet during the harvest ceremony, giving thanks to God for the harvest.

<i>O, yama danki</i>	<i>O, give thanks</i>
<i>O, yama danki na Señor</i>	<i>O, give thanks to the Lord</i>
<i>O, yama danki</i>	<i>O, give thanks</i>
<i>O, yama danki</i>	<i>O, give thanks</i>
<i>Mi di,</i>	<i>I said,</i>
<i>yama danki na Señor.¹²</i>	<i>give thanks to the Lord</i>

In the following song God is again praised for his help in providing a good harvest. It also focuses on reciprocal help and cooperation as essential aspects of harvesting.

<i>Ai Djo ee, Limaninan</i>	<i>Oh God, Limaninan</i>
<i>Bosonan tur bin kompañami awe</i>	<i>Come and accompany me today all of you</i>
<i>Awe mes Shon Dios a duna</i>	<i>Today Master God has given</i>
<i>Mi bunitanan bosnan bin kompañami</i>	<i>Nice people, come and accompany me</i>
<i>Awe mes, Shon Dios a duna</i>	<i>Today Master God has given</i>
<i>Shon Dios a duna awe ee,</i>	<i>Master God has given today,</i>
<i>Shon Dios a duna</i>	<i>Master God has given</i>
<i>Awe mes, Shon Dios ta duna eee</i>	<i>Today, Master God has given, eah</i>
<i>Limanaze, mira kon Shon Dios a duna nos</i>	<i>Limanaze, look how Master God has given us</i>
<i>Limanaze, Shon Dios a duna nos awe</i>	<i>Limanaze, Master God has given today</i>
<i>Mi Limanaze, mira kon Shon Dios a duna.¹³</i>	<i>My Limanaze, look how Master God has given.</i>

This reliance on God for a successful harvest must be acknowledged. It was a taboo not to recognize his power. The following story shows what might happen if the taboo is broken. Again God manifests his power in the natural world. In the Afro-Curaçaoans' religious beliefs the physical world is animated and no distinction is made between animals and human beings. In this particular case the dog assumes characteristics of a human being and is able to communicate with people. But as it misuses this ability it is punished.

Dios Tata tabatin un kachó ku por a papia. A bin sosodé ku Tata ta sali bai keiru kuné, anto tin un hòmber, ku ta traha su kunuku. Dios a mir'è i El a puntr'é: 'Ki dia bo ta kaba e kunuku akí?' E hòmber di: 'Mañan.' E no a bisa: 'Mañan ku Dios ke.' Dios no a gusta i El a bai. Ora nan a yega kas i e kachó a kere ku Tata ta na soño, e ke men ku Tata no ta mir'è, – pero Tata ta mira nos ku un orea, i tende nos ku un wowo – e kachó a kore yega serka e hòmber. El a papia. E di kuné: 'E hòmber, esun ku mi sa kana kuné no, ta Dios. Ora e puntrabo ki dia e kunuku ta kaba, bo ta bis'é: Mañan, ku Dios ke.' Ya Tata tabata sa kaba ku e kachó a bai reda. E siguiente dia Tata a kumindá e hòmber: 'Kon ta bai, bon hòmber, kon ta bai?' E hòmber di: 'Bon.' Tata di kuné: 'Ki dia e kunuku akí ta kaba?' E di ku Tata: 'Mañan ku Dios ke.' Tata a drei bisa e kachó: 'Tende lo bo tende, mira lo bo mira, ma papia sí lo bo no papia.' Ta p'esei kachó a keda ta hou, hou, keda hou, hou te datu dia djawe.¹⁴

God had a dog that could talk. Once God went to take a walk with his dog and they met a man who was working on the land. God asked him: 'When will you finish your work on the land?' The man answered: 'Tomorrow.' He did not say: 'Tomorrow with God's will.' God did not like this and left. When they returned home and the dog thought that God was asleep and he thought that God could not see him – but God sees us with one ear, and listens to us with one eye – he ran to the man. He spoke and said to him: 'The man, the one I usually walk with, is God. When He asks you when the work on the land will be finished, you must tell Him: 'Tomorrow, with God's will.' But God already knew that the dog had gone gossiping. The next day God asked the man: 'How are you, my good man, how are you?' He said: 'Good.' God asked him then: 'When will you finish working on your land?' The man said: 'Tomorrow, with God's will.' God then turned to his dog and said: 'You will hear, you will see, but you will not be able to talk.' That is why until this very day dogs can only say woof, woof, woof.

The following story which was transmitted by fishermen to the narrator is a reflection about man's place in nature. It again shows a flexible relationship between God, human beings and nature, whereby the power of God is recognized as being all-pervading. It also contains some terms in Guene, indicating African cultural connotations. In more specific terms, this story tries to explain why the sea at the northern coast of Curaçao, where fishermen also throw their lines to fish, is so rough and needs to be respected. Indirectly the story promotes the virtue of modesty, a value which is stressed in other forms. The overconfident sea is put in its place by God.

Laman a puntra Dios si e por a lag'é buta un pia riba tera. Anto Dios di kuné: 'Nò, si mi 'nabo un pia riba tera, bo ta kaba ku mundu na awa.' Laman a rabia i el a kanta:

*T'ami ta laman, eeah
Konalowé
Konalowé, Laman é
Konalowé*

The sea asked God if he could come ashore and God told him: 'No, if I give you the possibility to place your feet on land, you will flood the world.' The sea became angry and began to sing:

*I am the sea, eeah
Konalowé
Konalowé, the sea, eeah
Konalowé*

*Laman a rabia anto Dios a para ta mir'è.
Laman a dal un saltu, spat den laria dos biaha.*

The sea got angry and God stood there and looked at him and the sea jumped up, and

Ora su rabia a baha, Dios di kuné: 'Bo tin ku wardami anto awor.' Dios di kuné: 'Mi por dunabo un hende tur dia pa kuminda, pero si mi 'nabo un pia riba tera, bo ta kaba ku mundu na awa.' Anto e ora ei Dios a bis'é:

Akanasia makamba
Awe ta mundu a tres'é
Ke desir ta mundu a tres'é.

Ta Dios a kanta e kantika ei. Anto Dios di kuné: 'Bo ta mira e baranka aki? E baranka a lanta, el a krese bira altu.' Despues Dios di kuné: 'Maske kon bo sapatia, maske kon bo rabia, maske kon bo bira, bo ta bin dal den e baranka aki bai laria, pasa djei mes subi.'

C.M.: Hahaha, pasó si Dios dunabo un pia riba tera bo ta kaba mundu na awa.¹⁵

splashed twice. When he calmed down, God told him: 'You have to wait for me, now.' God told him: 'I can give you everyday a human being as food, but if I allow you to set foot on land, you will flood the world.' And then God told him:

Akanasia makamba
Today it is the world which brought him
Meaning that the world brought him.

God sang the song. Then God said to him: 'You see this rock? The rock was born and grew tall.' Then God said to him: 'No matter how high you jump, no matter how angry you get, no matter what you turn into, you will have to splash against this very rock, jump up high and from there you will come ashore.'

C.M.: Hahaha, because if God gives you the chance to come ashore, you will flood the world.

God's presence was also recognized in social relationships. It was customary for people to greet each other by saying *Djidjo*, a contraction of the words *Dia pa Djo* (*Dios*). Or one might say *Djidjo, mi ruman, Djidjo* (The day is for God, my brother/sister, the day is for God) (Juliana 1977a:221). Following this, one might inquire into the well-being of the person's family. Or they would greet each other by saying *kuminda Weze* or *kuminda Waze*, terms greeting God. Upon leaving, reference would again be made to God: *Te mañan ku Dios ke* (Till tomorrow with God's will). This demonstration of religiosity in the use of religious idiom for enhancing social relationships was also clear in the term *Diosolopaga* (God will bless you), when thanking someone. All these expressions stem from the concept of a Supreme Being determining everyone's lives. This was also manifest when one made plans for the future ('No por buta fiho') without mentioning 'with God's will'. The interviewee Eduardo Tokaai explained this religious outlook, which he applied in daily life:

E.T.: P'esei nan ta bisa: 'Te mañan ku Dios ke.' Asina nan ta bisa. Bo no por bisa 'te mañan'. Bo no tin òrdu di bisa 'te mañan'. Bo mester bisa 'te mañan ku Dios ke'. Anto e ora ei Dios ta sa ku bo fe ta den Dios. Pasó si Dios n' ke, bo no por yega mañan. Awor ta hende ku ta papia sin pensa kon palabra mester ta. 'Te mañan...?' Nò, bo n' sa. Bo por muri awé.¹⁶

E.T.: That is why people would say: 'Till tomorrow with God's will.' So they say. You must not say 'till tomorrow'. You are not allowed to. You must say: 'Till tomorrow with God's will.' Then God will know that you have faith in Him. Because if God doesn't want to, you cannot see tomorrow. Nowadays people talk without thinking how they have to say the words. 'Till tomorrow...?' You don't know. You may die today.

Artifacts were used to petition the help of the Supreme Being, thus revealing a synthesis with Roman Catholicism. For example, the *rosario* (rosary) was an important instrument for expressing religious belief. In 1856 a priest signaled that people wore rosaries around their necks as a sign of bearing the Catholic faith.¹⁷ Besides as an instrument of prayer it was also used as a charm when placed around the neck. Some people used it for good health; in cases of illness it was used as a means to aid recovery. These artifacts were believed to be infused with a special force and in that way would help the wearer.

Besides God, saints were believed to have power in determining one's destiny. One could request their divine intervention in difficult situations. Havisser's study (1987) based on the excavation of an Afro-Curaçaoan dwelling house on plantation Knip uncovered various statues which were used in homes, representing the cosmology of Afro-Curaçaoans. The use of Catholic statues to evoke help again indicates a syncretism. Afro-Catholic religion centered on the worship of saints and rites conducted before altars at home.¹⁸ These saints could also be portrayed in pictures which would be displayed in the homes. They were venerated in privacy at home or during ceremonies among a group of devotees.

The principal saint at that time was San Antonio de Padua (*San Antoni*), celebrated on the 13th of June.¹⁹ In the celebrations in his honour, called the *lele Tony*, people would congregate on nine consecutive days, the so-called *novena*, with the ceremony on the last day being the most elaborate. At some of these ceremonies people would dance to the rhythm of the drum in front of an altar upon which would be fruit, candles and rum. To this saint they would make a request. People would ask for the good health of their loved ones.²⁰ Single women turned to San Antonio when looking for a good husband, while married women turned to him in order to secure a good marriage, fertility, as well as well-behaved and healthy children. Farmers would petition for rain while fishermen would carry an image of the saint in their pockets to ward off dangers at sea or to request a good catch. In town, people would ask for money.

People's expectations of the saints were high and should they fail to meet their wishes the saints were punished. For example, the model of the saint would be turned with his back to the people, the little child he carried would be removed or he would be placed upside down in water. This idea of punishing saints who did not grant people their requests is also present in the history of western religiosity, as the Dutch anthropologist Gerard Rooijackers demonstrated in his study of rural people in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe (1994:145).

According to the anthropologist Richenel Ansano, these celebrations for the saints also enforced group affinity. He was informed in an interview with Ciro Eleonora, a Curaçaoan key informant on culture, that during these celebrations there would be extensive donations of food. Groups of people would put aside food in order to contribute to this feast for the whole community (Ansano 1988:23; 1990:188-9). This indicates that these celebrations were a way of meeting the practical needs of individuals. Food in this sense implied more than physical nourishment; it was used to emphasize group formation (Wilk 1999:245).

San Juan was venerated in an elaborate fashion on the 24th of June. On that day people with a name derived from Juan were recognized. The rituals of this celebration were accompanied by music and songs and focused on requesting rain to ensure a successful harvest (Rosalia 1997:119). San Pedro was celebrated on the 29th of June to ensure the

well-being of fishermen. These rituals related to the satisfaction of people's basic needs and tell us what Afro-Curaçaoans considered important in their lives.

In addition to the Roman Catholic icons, the Afro-Curaçaoans' spiritual domain encompassed a vast array of supernatural forces, including good and evil spirits relating to the deceased. The evil spirits, named *zumbi*, were the souls of people who had lived a bad life; their punishment was to dwell among the living and cause them harm.²¹ They were also called *alma malu* (bad soul) or *spiritu malu* (bad spirit). According to Brenneker they were sometimes equated with the devil and were therefore also called *djabel* or *satanas*. They were mostly active in the evening and rested at midday under the tamarind or in the manzaliña tree (*Hippomane mancinella*) (Brenneker 1966:20, 32). People would draw crosses on their fences, walls, trees and front doors in order to deter evil spirits (Latour 1949; Brenneker 1966:5). Sorcerers (*hasidó di brua*) could release these evil forces to harm people (Latour 1948b:239).

Spirit worship was sometimes conducted before altars at home (Brenneker 1969:688-91). According to van Meeteren, one of the first scholars to write on *brua* practices on Curaçao, *brua* was not always associated with evil. The *hasidó di brua* could, for example, also be a person with knowledge of medicinal herbs (1947:149). The priest Latour, by contrast, called *brua* practices *Vudún*, as these were commonly known in Haiti. In an article 'Voodoo op Curaçao' (1949), he perceived these practices as superstition. According to him they had not developed widely on the island, as the slaves had not been allowed to congregate and due to the civilizing work done after emancipation by Dutch priests. In the 1960s Brenneker studied the phenomenon of *brua* together with Juliana, as a collective term for sorcery, charlatanism, spiritualism, superstition and everything that goes beyond the limits of the natural world (Brenneker 1966:1, 7).

A rather neutral definition of *brua* is given by Ansano, who defines it (1988:9; 1990:174) in a more functionalist way, as an agglomeration of non-Christian spiritual practices, similar to the *obeah*²² of the British West Indies, including preparing and using lucky charms, eliminating purported and declared enemies, healing physical illnesses and social relationships, ensnaring spouses, divining, making amulets, possessing spirits and consulting the dead. What he did not mention is that in addition *brua* can be used to negate a curse, in a similar fashion as *obeah* (Simpson 1980:189). In most of these definitions *brua* is described as something stemming from the mind of primitive people, with the intention of causing harm to a third person. In my study on *hasidó di brua* I deduced that *brua* worked on two levels, either doing harm or good, depending on the nature of the request. Evil practices entailed the use of paraphernalia and rituals with the intention of harming somebody. However, the same person might perform a service with good intentions, such as curing someone.

The presence of *brua* practitioners in Curaçaoan society during slavery was studied by Rutten (1989, 1999, 2003). Also following emancipation, some cases were identified which can be linked to these practices. For example, part of a testimony in a court case of 14 May 1872 dealing with the theft of a baby vest, mentioned that a fifteen year old girl from town had sent someone to buy oil for her lamp in order to see who had stolen her baby vest.²³ This could be interpreted as a form of divination whereby the person through communicating with the world of spirits tried to discover the identity of the thief. *La Union* of 15

May 1893 reported that during three consecutive days different houses had burned down in Banda Bou and that people attributed this to the negative force of *brua* or sorcery. Another example was a complaint made in 1911 to the district master in which a person called Lica who lived in town was accused of practicing sorcery by Amanda and Devilla; according to them she had swindled them of their money, thus also indicating a financial aspect to *brua* practices.²⁴

In the same year the master of the third district, a rural area, had to take action when a whole neighbourhood had carried a mature woman around in a hammock and physically abused her before returning her to her home in an unconscious state.²⁵ Malicious gossip suggested that she was to blame for the disappearance of a certain 35 year old Victor, who had left his home one evening never to return.²⁶ People believed that she could float between heaven and earth and had evil powers. This type of action could be taken to further extremes, as in the case of the assassination of Rosa on Bonaire, a Curaçaoan woman accused of being a sorcerer, a *hasidó di brua*. They found her corpse stabbed seven times and her head crushed by a stone.²⁷

Orlando Patterson (1967:185) claims that people accused of witchcraft were often people not abiding by the social norms and were therefore considered by the community to be unsociable. Success and conspicuous happiness often engendered envy. This was also the case for two women whose stories were carried on in the oral tradition and who lived in the twentieth century. Juliana and Brenneker were able to collect the story of one of them, Katalina Beleku, who lived in the eastern part of the island. Both women had their own shops and were very enterprising (Clemencia 1996:83-91).²⁸ People attributed their success to the fact that they danced with *Almasola*, an evil spirit who gave but demanded something in return. The other one was accused of being able to transform into an animal at will.

According to Brenneker (1969) and Ansano (1988) women in particular were believed to form a pact with *Almasola*, who promised material prosperity (money, houses, land and jewelry) in exchange for the sacrifice of human lives. As a symbol of this pact *Almasola* would come every night to a specific place to dance with the woman. Ansano further states that in the early part of the twentieth century the *baile ku Almasola* developed around the city of Willemstad, lasting well into the 1960s (1988:4). Brenneker (1969:691) records that in Banda Bou other women were believed to be dancing with *Almasola*, revealing a dispersion of the custom on the island.

In his book *Brua* (1966) Brenneker gave an overview of several evil spirits who at the time formed part of Afro-Curaçaoan cosmology. The following Table is based on his collection.

Table 9.1 Names and Characteristics of Evil Spirits in the Nineteenth and the Beginning of the Twentieth Century on Curaçao

No	Names	Characteristics
1	Almasola	An evil spirit who promises material prosperity in exchange for human lives.
2	Boli' fuego	A fireball which in the evening is carried in an open dish by a mother as punishment for killing her child.
3	Dambala	A powerful spirit.
4	Djanco	The leader of evil spirits, who is seen principally during Lent.
5	Kabes di kadaver	Synonym for Djanco.
6	Kumbu	A luminous erring spirit.
7	Djengelé	A spirit.
8	Doño di Santana	A spirit who owns the graveyard. Also named San Elia.
9	Gungu	An erring spirit.
10	Kofi	A luminous erring spirit.
11	Lehi	A luminous erring spirit.
12	Lèngè	Another term for Zeh.
13	Onzegbá	Someone with the ability to become invisible, roaming and causing harm.
14	Zeh	Someone who can remove a person's skin and fly through the air at night in search of a new born child from which it can suck blood. It was believed that by throwing salt on the skin of <i>Zeh</i> or <i>èzè</i> (or <i>lèngè</i>) it would leave and never return.

The spirit *Damballah* was mentioned in a song by Damasio Hooi, born in 1887 without legs and missing his right hand. The mention of the name *Damballah* shows that he had some knowledge of the belief-system in Haiti, where *Damballah* (or *Dambala Wèdo*) was an ancient snake deity predominantly present in the Vodún religion. In this song, Hooi, alias Kokoti, tells *Damballah* that although he is a crippled goat, he knows how to get his food on the mountain rock. It is uncertain whether Kokoti's comparison of himself to a goat stems from *Damballah* being a deity who likes goat meat.²⁹ If this is the case it also indicates some knowledge of this religious practice.

Another spirit that people appeared to use was the *Doño di santana* or the *San Elia*, who surrounded graves and graveyards. Latour (1949:239) in his review of *The Virgin Islands and their People* (1944) by J. Antonio Jarvis – comparing certain rituals on the Afro-Virgin Islanders to those of the Afro-Curaçaoans – wrote that people would use human bones taken from graveyards in their sorcery rituals. Simpson noted that this practice reoccurred in various places around the Caribbean and in Africa. He stated that in West-Africa people threw a trail of grave around someone's living space. Also in Trinidad grave dirt would be used to harm people (1980:96). Religious paraphernalia associated with sorcery

and death were the four candles (*bela di morto*) which lit beside someone's coffin had the power to harm a chosen person (Brenneker 1966:5).

Spirits were also present in the rituals surrounding rites of passage, in which people moved from one life phase to another. At birth a child was believed to be very vulnerable, so that certain rituals had to be performed to protect it from *èzè* or *zeh* (also called *lèngè*). It was thought that this spirit could remove the skin of babies and fly through the air. During the night it would suck the child's blood. It was believed that by throwing salt on the skin of *èzè* it would be banished. According to Brenneker, these beliefs and practices occurred both in town and in the countryside. Here, the combination of Roman Catholicism and other religious practices is evident. For the newly born needed to be christened within eight days; until then it had to be protected from *èzè*. The ritual of *wak èzè* or *wak zè* was a gathering of family, neighbours and friends for nine consecutive evenings after the birth to guard the baby from this evil spirit.³⁰

This gathering was one of many securing reciprocity (Brenneker 1969:75; van Meeteren 1947). This custom appears in most Caribbean societies and is known under the name of *Soukoyant* in Dominica and French Guyana. The anthropologist Simpson, who researched this phenomenon in West-Africa and the Caribbean, considers it a syncretism of West-African and western beliefs. In West-Africa, Haiti, the Bahamas, the South Sea Islands and some parts of the southern United States, *Soukoyant* was punished by sprinkling red pepper on the discarded skin (1980:98). The *Lou-garo* mentioned by Courlander, similar to *èzè*, is also destroyed by sprinkling salt on its skin (1960:98).

Spiritual customs surrounding death were highly revered. These included several non-Catholic rituals and symbols employed by Afro-Curaçaoans. Special rituals were enacted in order to comfort the mourners and send the deceased to the afterworld. Here also the interrelationship between Catholic faith and tradition is clear. When death was imminent, a priest was called to administer the last rites. The death of a person would be signaled in advance by means of death marks. These might for example take the form of a circular bruise appearing on the body of a friend or family member of the person to die. This mark would vanish after the person's death. Other omens were taken from the natural world. For example, the appearance of a black butterfly or an owl, flying either from east to west or from west to east, a rooster crowing in the middle of the night and a dog barking at night.

In the performance of these rituals, certain people assumed leadership roles, due to their knowledge of traditional practices or their ability in other areas, for example by performing as musicians, as singers in Guene, as curers of illnesses or as 'hasidó di brua'. These were people who in regular society did not hold any social position and who were usually disparaged and dismissed but at certain times were able to perform as effective leaders (Smith 2001:140).

The Search for the Self

The previous paragraphs addressed beliefs that Afro-Curaçaoans had about the world they lived in. In their cosmology, the figure of God played a predominant role with respect to food, social relationships and destiny. In answering the question 'Where did Afro-

Curaçaoans perceive themselves to be in relation to this orientation to the world?, I would like to expand upon the concept of *pekadó* (man the sinner). This appears in many songs and proverbs and seems to conceptualize the way Afro-Curaçaoans positioned themselves in the world. It is, for example, part of the following song praising God for providing a good harvest. God, who intends the best for everyone, is opposed to humankind as a collection of sinners.

*Mira kon nos a biba na mundu
Ta nos mes ta malu na mundu
Pekadó di mundu, eeh
Ta nos mes ta malu na mundu
Mi pekadó di mundu, eh
Shon Dios tin tur kos pa nos
Mira kon Shon Dios
Tin tur kos pa nos.³¹*

*Look at how we lived in this world
It is we ourselves who are bad in this world
Sinners of the world, eah
It is we ourselves who are bad in this world
I sinner of the world, eah
Master God has everything for us
Look at how Master God
has everything for us.*

Another song containing the term *pekadó* is *Di ki manera*, perceiving mankind's well-being as determined by others with power. The lyrics 'If I behave well, the sinner finds that I am misbehaving, if I behave badly, sinners would talk scandal of me', portray a feeling of hopelessness, because in whatever way one behaves, one is still judged negatively. As this was said to be a slave song the underlying feeling of domination is evident. Different variants from different informants across the island have been collected of this song. Juliana and Brenneker collected six.³² Rosalia (1997:17) and myself collected other variants, from people born after emancipation.³³ This indicates that the song continued to be transmitted to the younger generation, who applied it to help comprehend its own situation of domination.

*Di ki manera
Di ki manera
nos ta biba n'e mundu aki,
ora mi hasi bon,
pekadó di m'a hasi malu,
ora mi hasi malu,
pekadó ta marmorami.*

*Tell me how
Tell me how
we are to live on this earth,
when I behave well,
sinners find that I am misbehaving,
when I behave badly,
sinners would talk scandal of me.*

My variant of the song resembles one collected by Brenneker and Juliana. This one was sung by an informant born in the eastern part of the island. Rosalia's variant specifies in which areas of life the domination was more profoundly felt. It relates the difficulties regarding land ownership and farming. The following stanza describes the feelings of farmers when plantation owners would roam cattle over their land and let them eat the maize stalks, as part of the *paga tera* arrangement.

Di ki manera
Di ki manera
nos ta biba n'e mundu aki,
ora mi hasi bon,
pekadó di m'a hasi malu,
ora mi hasi malu,
pekadó ta marmorami.
Di ki manera
Di ki manera
nos ta biba n'e mundu aki,
M'a sali kas
Ta kunuku mi ta bai
Yega port'e kunuku
ata baka den kunuku.³⁴

Tell me how
Tell me how
we are to live on this earth,
when I behave well,
sinners find that I am misbehaving,
when I behave badly,
sinners would talk scandal of me.
Tell me how
Tell me how
we are to live on this earth,
I left home
On the way to my farm
When I reached the gate
I saw the grazing cows.

On a different level the song emphasizes equality: those with power are sinners just like those without power. The same notion also appears in the following narrative, which reflects on death and stresses that there is no distinction between rich and poor, black and white. In this concept of life, death is life's leveller. Erquiles Martes, 77 years of age in 1976, stated in an interview with Brenneker and Juliana: 'Lamuèrtè no konosé riku, e no konosé pober. Bo por ta kon riku ku bo ta, dia yega bo tempu bo mester bai' (Death does not distinguish between rich or poor. You can be very rich, but when your time comes you have to go).³⁵ It was through their mortality that plantation owners were revealed to be human beings. Tokaai reflected on this in the following way:

E shonnan ta'a hasi manera hende ku no ta muri. Ku no ke muri i laga e mundu aki. Mi tin mala lenga. Pasó ora un hende bisami ku un shon a muri, mi ta bisa: 'E no por a muri, pasó e ta goberná, e no por muri.' Nan no ta kòrda ku tin un Dios ku por kastigá nan.³⁶

The land owners behaved like people who would not die. Who do not want to die and leave this world. I have an evil tongue. Because when they tell me that one of those people died, I say: 'No, he could not have died, because if you are in command like that, you cannot possibly die.' They are not aware that there is a God who can smite them down.

This philosophy of death as a leveller is also expressed in the following song.

Di mulena toto na uze
Ai pober
di mulena toto na uze
Pober mi ta anto
Mi mama a nengami
Ai, pober ta muri, blanku tambe
Ai, di mulena pober na uze.³⁷

Di mulena toto na uze³⁸
Oh, poor man
di mulena toto na uze
I am poor and
My mother has rejected me
Oh, poor people die, but whites also
Ai, di mulena pober na uze.³⁹

Several narratives revealed how people had misused their powers to reach their goal. They would reflect, for example, on how plantation owners could become poor before they died or experience an agonizing death. This coincides with the concept that everything happens for a reason: ‘Nada to pasa pornada’ (Nothing just happens) and ‘Kada pakiko tin su pasombra’ (Everything has its ‘because of’).⁴⁰ This notion is apparent in the following narrative, in which Virginia Meulens recalls a story told to her by her father about a wicked former slave-owner who used to punish his slaves severely. She explains his agonizing death as a punishment for the atrocities he had committed.

Mi tata a kontami. Tabatin un hòmber ku yama Chado. Esei ta bomba sutadó Muhénan na estado e ta pone e barika den buraku, anto suta nan. Ku e pidi pordon, e hòmber ta bisa: ‘Ainda bo mester di mas. Bo ta muchu vrij-postig.’ Pader sa ku mi a mira e hòmber ei su morto, dia mi tabata na San Juan. Mi a mira ku dia el a muri, tur su atras tabata dispidi, na bichi. E tabatin un kas ku tranké di piedra, tur e tranké ta na muska. Muska grandi, di e oló ku tabatin den kas. Esei ta pa pasombra el a suta e hendenan. Mal sutá. Su kastigu.⁴¹

My father told me. There was a man named Chado. He was a former slave-driver who used to beat people during slavery. Those women who were pregnant he would place them with their belly in a hole, and he would beat them. When they begged for pardon, he would say: ‘No, you need more beating. You are too forward.’ Father, you know, I saw how this man came to his end. His backside was all rotten and full of worms. His home had a fence made of stone and this was full of flies. Big flies, because of the scent which came from inside his home. That was because he used to ill-treat people. Ill-treat them very badly. That was his punishment.

Reference was often made to the attitude of acting arrogant, high (*orgullo*) or *krea idea*, as in the saying: ‘Krea idea no ta sirbi pa nada. Ora morto bini bo no por hibebe niun kaminda’ (Acting high does not help you. Because when death comes, you cannot carry it along). The following song emphasizes acting ‘high’ as a cause for the breach in communication between God and men.

*Ai Dios Weze
mira kon bon Dios a bai laga nos
Pakiko nos no por biba laminiá na mundu
manera Shon Dios a bisa nos?
Nos a buska orgullo, Weze
Mira kon nos ta ku orgullo ku otro na mundu
Ai Weze
P’esei Shon Dios a laga mundu awe.⁴²*

*Oh God Weze
look at how the good Lord has left us
Why can we not live on earth
like Master God has told us?
We looked for pride, God
Look at how we act high with each other in the
world
Oh God
That is why Master God has left the world
today.*

Despite the notion of death as the ultimate leveller, it was at death that Afro-Curaçaoans focused on respectability. Much effort was made to ensure that the proper rituals surrounded a dignified burial. Elderly people always stressed in interviews that they paid the

sitter on time, so that they would have a decent burial. These *sitters* were burial funds established by the Roman Catholic Church in the second half of the nineteenth century. They were a network of people who paid a weekly contribution which was registered in a special book (*buki di sitter*). Through this they could afford a coffin and were sometimes able to pay for coffin bearers. Some others would have their coffins placed on the rafters of their roof well before their own death. Some would have their clothes prepared in advance. People would ensure they had a proper family grave (*kèldèr*).

When, to the shame of the family, funds were insufficient, assistance was often given by others. Informants would emphasize that when someone died without a coffin ready, family members would borrow one and later return it or replace it with a new one.

P.B.: *Nan tabatin kaha wardá na kas?*

C.K.: *Na kas di mi mama mes tabatin. Ora bo ta pover bo ta traha dam, warda awa. Tabata fi'é tambe. Ora un hende ta kasi pa muri – tempunan ayá mester a dera su siguiente dia mes – si e hende ei no tin kaha, bo ta fi'é esun di bo. Si bo no yuda, Dios no ta yudabo.⁴³*

P.B.: *People used to keep their coffin in their homes?*

C.K.: *They did. At my mother's house we had one. When you are poor, you have to be prepared. Sometimes they would lend it to other people. When someone was dying – in those days you had to bury the person the day after – if they did not have a coffin, you would lend them yours. If you don't help, God will not help you.*

Although on a death in the community people felt morally obliged to help, help was not always forthcoming. In 1891 the governor sent a decree stating that an indigent⁴⁴ who had died in an institution with neither family nor the Church being able to pay for the funeral, would be buried in a simple black coffin to be transported in the hearse of the poor, accompanied by at the most six coffin bearers.⁴⁵ People who did not live socially with others also had a problem in this field (Rosalia 1989:25).

The following song was sung during the digging of graves. It is an example that the lack of communalism portrayed did not necessarily restrict itself to those who were indigent.⁴⁶ The singer is angry that although he cooperated with people in the past, he did not receive the due reciprocal help he had expected. He is left to cope alone with his difficult situation. He is unable to fulfill an act of gratitude towards his mother, as he could not give her a proper funeral. He had to carry her corpse on a piece of wood. In this song reciprocity and togetherness are emphasized as important values.

*Mi shon, mi n' biba malu
Ku ningun hende riba mundu
Ai Dios ta rib'un palu
M'a karga mort'i mi mama
Mama mama un bela na mi mama
Ai Dio' ta rib'un palu
M'a karga morto di mi mama.⁴⁷*

*My shon, I have not lived on bad terms
With anyone on earth
Oh God it is on a piece of wood that
I carried the corpse of my mother
Mama mama a candle for my mother
Oh God it is on a piece of wood that
I carried the corpse of my mother.*

Another variant:

*Mi shon, mi n' biba malu
Ku niun pushi ni kachó
Ai Dio', ta riba un palu
M'a karga mort'i mama.⁴⁸*

*I have not lived on bad
terms with neither a cat nor a dog
Oh God it is on a piece of wood that
I carried the corpse of my mother.*

The number of people present at the activities surrounding a death also indicated the status of the deceased in the community. This was likely to be based on social rather than material factors. Someone knowledgeable on matters of interest for the community, for example, had high status.

Attention and assistance would start when someone was dying. Friends, families and neighbours would gather at the bedside of a person believed to be close to death to offer help and support. They would bring along items such as coffee, tea and biscuits, and pray the rosary together, sing religious songs, tell riddles and stories about life. When the person died, this was announced by a *kachu*-player, someone making a proper death announcement by blowing the cow horn (*kachu*). By strategically announcing the death of a person in a *kachu* on a hill top a much larger group was mobilized in order to offer emotional and material support to the family of the deceased. Again the number of people who came to pay their respects was an indication of the social status of the deceased. These wakes were intercommunity rituals demonstrating solidarity with the bereaved. People would sit and talk about the deceased or tell stories.

The corpse was laid out by a *labadó di morto*, who could also be a woman. All the body openings were filled with cotton wool drenched in a liquid made of garlic lime, kamfer and chalk to prevent the escape of gas. The corpse was then displayed in the home of the deceased. The open casket was placed on a bier between four candles (*bela di morto*). Because of that the number four had special significance. The mourners walked to the coffin. Sometimes a special person (*Yoradó*) would be hired to cry at the funeral, to show that the deceased was someone who had lived well with the people in his community. People also went to extremes to organize elaborate funerals. The Catholic Church condemned this, as it went against the modest behaviour it extolled.⁴⁹

After the funeral, family and friends would return to the home of the deceased. On arriving they had to ritually 'wash their hands'. On a table a wash basin and a pitcher of water were placed, together with a crucifix, some leaves of the olive-tree, a piece of blue soap and some holy water (*awa bendita*). Everyone in turn washed their hands in the basin. Following this, during eight consecutive nights rituals were conducted, during which people prayed the rosary and sang songs. The last night, *yukan* or *ocho dia*, was the most impressive. It was led by a sacristan and the prayers were said in a mixture of Papiamentu and Latin (also showing the role of the Catholic Church). During that night, similar to other Afro-Caribbean societies such as Suriname, Nanzi stories and other tales were told.⁵⁰ This became an integral part of the *ocho dia* and is even mentioned in the proverb 'Laga kuenta pa Ocho dia', literally: Leave the stories for the eighth day or nine-night ceremony.

Trickery

Both de Certeau (1984) and Scott (1990) have approached cunning and trickery amongst subjugated people as an orientation to life and to the world. They see it as a game being played out between themselves and the dominant class. In this game, the subordinate group realizes its own forms of power while complying or appearing to comply with the dominant image. Within this compliance they can employ several techniques that conceal and aid them in gaining power. In the case of Curaçao the game element in everyday life is acknowledged in the proverb ‘Kada tambú tin su yorá, kada muhé tin su zoyá i kada bida tin su andá’: Each drum has its own rhythm, each woman has her own way of wiggling, and each life has its own way). Hendrikse-Rigaud interprets this as meaning the world is a stage on which every person plays his part (1994:114).

According to Scott, powerless people hide behind and gain strength from popular, seemingly innocent oral traditions. The game element is clearly present in aspects of life such as proverbs, folk tales, visions, gossip, rumours and humour. One example is the genre of the trickster stories in which the shrewd ‘trickster’, a cunning subordinate, gains the upper hand over a dominant figure. The common ownership and acceptance of these stories allow the subordinate to view it as an example of achievement (Scott 1990:126-82). For the Afro-Curaçaoans, Kompa Nanzi is the main figure and is regarded as a hero. Similar to other Caribbean societies, his heroic status is reflected in the fact that his name became the stories’ generic title (Rhone 2000). In this sense these stories are comparable with the Berr Rabbit stories in the United States, where scholars have argued that this figure in African-American folk tales was the symbol of the crafty, underdog enslaved or black person (Dorson 1983:38).

The theologist Armando Lampe (1988) emphasized the element of resistance within Nanzi stories and concluded that these were not just children’s stories but ways in which the Afro-Curaçaoans manifested their resistance. Nanzi, as a small spider a seemingly weak figure, is able to outsmart even the most powerful creatures, such as the tiger and the king, through his tricks and wit. In reality these stories display the wish of people to transcend their powerless position. In this sense they are not only an expression of social reality, but also a denial of it. The search for the opposite in life is also evident in the case of Chevalier, who had killed a man named Johannes. When Chevalier wanted to defend himself in court, he started by making reference to his skin colour and opposed a common conception by saying: ‘Even though I am black of colour, I will represent myself.’⁵¹

Nanzi was a figure respected for his quick-wittiness. People attributed to themselves or to a family member the creative resourcefulness of Nanzi, as the following statement reveals:

Mi tata ta manera Kompa Nanzi. Mi tata tabata un hòmber, e dianan ayá nan ta yama nan sabí.⁵² E tabata un hòmber mashá sabí, pasó ni menernan no tabata por kuné. Ni pastornan no tabata por kuné. E tabata manera Kompa Nanzi.⁵³

My father is like Kompa Nanzi. My father was a man, in those days they would call them intelligent. He was a very intelligent man, because not even the district master knew how to deal with him. Not even the priests knew how to deal with him. He was like Kompa Nanzi.

Several proverbs emanating from inter-human relationships contain the same underlying philosophy as the Nanzi stories. For example:

- *Si bo bai traha hende bibu bo ta bira nan katibu.* ‘If you work with living people you will become their slave’ (Hendrikse-Rigaud 1994:26).
- *Sinti di hende ta kashi di piká.* ‘Human beings sooner think badly than well’ (Hendrikse-Rigaud 1994:108).
- *Palabrua di: pa motibu di hende bibu mi ta skonde mi kara.* ‘The owl said, because of living people, I have to hide my face’ (Hendrikse-Rigaud 1994:294).
- *Sloke di: maishi chiki na mondi tempu di sekura, ta hende bibu mes a pon’e.* ‘The bird sloke (Colinus cristatus)⁵⁴ said: when you find millet in the wood in the dry period, it is because living people have placed it there’ (Hendrikse-Rigaud 1994:295).
- *Guengu di: pa librami di hende bibu mi a bai drumi na lagun.* ‘The fish Guengu said: in order to free myself from the living people I went to sleep in the lagoon’ (Hendrikse-Rigaud 1994:303).
- *Söldachi di: hende bibu a ponemi karga mi kas riba lomba.* ‘The hermit crab said: it is living people who made me carry my home on my back’ (Hendrikse-Rigaud 1994:294).
- *Hende bibu ta sentebibu.* ‘Living people are just as bitter as aloe’ (Hendrikse-Rigaud 1994:218).
- *Zumbi di Plánmulina di: si hende bibu no tabata mal hende, guiotin di chumbu lo a pasa. Zumbi di Makaya di: hende bibu ta mal hende, sino plaka falsu lo a pasa na Kòrsou.* ‘The Plánmulina ghost said: if living people were not bad, the lead guiotin coin would have been accepted as current money. The Makaya ghost said: if living people were not bad, counterfeit would have been accepted as genuine money on Curaçao’ (Hendrikse-Rigaud 1994:278).

These eight proverbs refer to mankind in a negative way: people are not to be trusted. They have the power to gossip, to curse, to lie and to cheat. These sayings reaffirm what was said in the previous examples, showing that in post-emancipation society Afro-Curaçaoan daily life was not characterized only by harmony and solidarity. There was also distrust and a lack of solidarity among people, particularly in difficult situations. The scholars Valdemar Marcha and Paul Verweel refer to this as the culture of fear, which is paradoxical in nature and leads to complicated social relationships (2003:61-2).

This paradoxical attitude is demonstrated in the ways people regarded trickery, which was also ambivalent. On the one hand there was condemnation, but on the other hand there was also respect for someone who was able to trick those with power. When informants stressed that a certain person was cunning, this was always accompanied by laughter as a form of consent. As previously stated, the element of trickery was also present in other stories than those about Nanzi. In the stories told during the ocho dia ceremony the witty person succeeds in overcoming all challenges. In his book *Echa cuenta* (1970) Juliana published several of these stories, which also contain elements of trickery.

Also in other aspects of everyday life people were respected for their cunning. An example of this is the persistence of the Guene language, which allowed people to conceal their criticisms of those with power. This language was developed as a medium of communica-

tion among the enslaved and was used until the twentieth century (Martinus 1997). It turned out that on some plantations the inhabitants were prohibited from singing in Guene, as the owners suspected that they were singing about them.⁵⁵ This was also related to Brenneker in an interview with Teodoor Coco, born in 1885, who recalled a particular event on the plantation of San Juan, where someone sang in Guene about a cow on Bonaire that could not catch him ('Baka di Boneiru, ma e baka no por kowemi?'). The other workers informed the owner of the plantation that the person was singing about him and he was subsequently punished.⁵⁶ Another example was given by an informant born in 1907, who related how the labourers of the phosphate industry in the eastern part of the island used to sing about their supervisors in Guene, but lied about the songs' content to their overseers⁵⁷.

Conclusion

The lives of Afro-Curaçaoans were hard due to poverty and the boundaries set by the white elite, the State and the Roman Catholic Church. I have looked at how Afro-Curaçaoans created beliefs and meanings which became apparent and were expressed in the concept 'tambú di bida'.

What stands out is that in their daily struggle to survive they developed numerous coping methods generated through their outlook on life. This is clearly manifested in the ability to create these methods on an economic, a social and also on a spiritual level. People tried to find an outlet through singing, dancing and story-telling, thus making life more bearable. It was in this area that women, especially the female tambú singers, contravened what was deemed respectable behaviour, showing assertiveness and courage in their daily life.

On this level they combined their traditional beliefs with the vision of the world they lived in. The interplay of Catholic saints with good and bad spirits was an example of this. This was also evident in the value placed on reciprocal help and social assistance. Often people would unite and perform tasks together. This spirit of interdependence and solidarity was an important survival strategy and clearly revealed itself in many areas of life, not only in economic activities such as harvesting, but also in the case of illness and death. Most of these actions were motivated by spiritual ideas of what was considered good in social relationships. In their daily lives people practiced their religiosity and expressed their creativity within the parameters set by the institutions of power. At the same time, many sayings refer to the disappointment about unfulfilled expectations of reciprocity among peers. This might indicate that the decision to reciprocate and cooperate depended on much more than solely morality and that socio-economic conditions as well as self-interest may also need to be taken into consideration.

Notes

- 1 Lampe 1988; Streefkerk 1999, 2003.
- 2 Interview Felix Martina (born 21-2-1894), Brenneker/Juliana, 28-3-1978 (T 62, Fundashon Biblioteka Públiko Kòrsou).
- 3 'Tambú' refers to the celebration, to the music performed during this event and to the corresponding dance. If no drum was available, people would improvise using a box, for example, to beat the rhythm. See NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Rol van Strafszaken 1878, Procesverbaal no. 24 for a description of how people sang while someone beat the rhythm on a box.
- 4 Sometimes a *banderita* was used to this end: a short verse would be composed and written on a small flag. Its lyrical content would express a sly dig at a person (Zikinzá-collection, T 247, NatAr). People would buy a banderita with a text that appealed to their feelings. These texts were often used for the tambú. The use of a banderita implies a certain degree of literacy, so that it probably stems from the period when an increasing number of people could read and write. Being able to thus vent one's opinion on events and on people reveals a kind of openness and courage. However, since this was done by using innuendo's and metaphors it is also clear that too direct an approach would meet with negative consequences. At the end of the year district masters were extra vigilant. They would report whether the Christmas festivities had been conducted peacefully.
- 5 The priest Euwens (1906) observed that due to members of the white class participating in these scandalous celebrations, they could not be eradicated.
- 6 Rosalia (1997:139). According to Rosalia, the Afro-Curaçaoans sneeringly labelled this celebration *tambú di señorita*, to distinguish it from the real tambú.
- 7 Juliana (1981:19) mentions that in the 1930s this type of request was first heard.
- 8 Interview Wam Sem (1888), Brenneker/Juliana, 1959 (Zikinzá-collection, T 380 NatAr); Interview Hose Melano (1905), Brenneker/Juliana, 1959 (Zikinzá-collection, T 789 NatAr).
Shon Grandi mes a duna The big master has given
El a duna awe He has given today
- 9 Interview Victor Bartolomeo (born 1935), Allen/La Croes, 8-3-2000 (personal collection).
- 10 *Amigoe*, 1-5-1943.
- 11 Interview Victor Bartolomeo (born 1935), Allen/La Croes, 8-3-2000 (personal collection); see also Zikinzá-collection, T 380 and T 789 (NatAr).
- 12 Interview Mario and Chilin Martes (8-11-1916), Brenneker/Juliana, 11-4-1984 (Zikinzá-collection, T 108 and T 109, NatAr).
- 13 Zikinzá-collection, T 456, NatAr.
- 14 Interview Augustin Bartolomeo (born 1889), Brenneker/Juliana, February 1982 (T 80, Fundashon Biblioteka Públiko Kòrsou).
- 15 Interview Carlitu Martina (born 1905), Brenneker/Juliana, 26-4-1984 (T 101, Fundashon Biblioteka Públiko Kòrsou).
- 16 Interview Eduardo Tokaai (born 1899), Allen, 12-9-1984 (NatAr).
- 17 Kerstgeschenk 1883:166.
- 18 See, for example, the information about the house of Eliza, which burned down after a candle fell from an altar in her home (NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken, Journalen 2e en 3e district, inv. no. 177, 4-3-1922/31).
- 19 It was said that he had fathered a child and was therefore closer to humans.
- 20 Interview Virginia Blanken (born 24-8-1901), Brenneker/Juliana, 5-6-1973 (T 32, Fundashon Biblioteka Públiko Kòrsou).
- 21 The term 'zumbi' apparently derived from the word 'zombi' (Congo) and refers to the spirits of the deceased. Shon Pa (born 1899), interviewed by Juliana and Brenneker, states that a 'zumbi' is the soul of an evil person who after death did not get a rest. A 'zumbi' can take the form of a dog, duck, hen or iguana. They are found in the woods and like to live under old trees. A spirit, in contrast, can be a good force.

- 22 'Obeah' is a term used in the English-speaking Caribbean and refers to folk magic, sorcery and religious practices.
- 23 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Rol van Strafzaken 14-5-1872, Procesverbaal no. 19.
- 24 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Brievenboeken 2e en 3e district, 1905-1919, inv. no. 167, 29-9-1911/263.
- 25 NatAr, Archief van het gouvernement, Journalen 2e en 3e district, 1906-1935, inv. no. 174, 11-5-1911, 5-6-1911.
- 26 NatAr, idem, 3-5-1911.
- 27 *La Union*, 22-7-1896.
- 28 Joceline Clemencia approached the life of Katalina from a feministic point of view and explains why someone like Katalina was condemned in society by the clergy and their followers (1996:83-91). Katalina owned cattle and sold homemade bread, biscuits, clothes and the produce of her land. She also sold liquor to the workers at the mine company of Santa Barbara and organized parties specifically for rich people living in town (1996:83-4). The other woman owned a shop and rented different houses.
- 29 To the amazement of many, despite his handicap Damasio Hooi (Tomas Kokoti) was able to work and dance (Zikinzá-collection, T 1103, NatAr). Courlander 1960:20, 84.
- 30 Zikinzá-collection, T 758, NatAr. They would also sing the following song (T 705), which the informant Marvelita Comenencia (born 1903, living in Kanga, central Curaçao) called *kantika di 8 dia di boutismo* (the song after eight days of baptism).
- | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>Mi lèngè leidó</i> | <i>My lèngè leidó</i> |
| <i>Mi lèngè tei den (2x)</i> | <i>My lèngè is there</i> |
| <i>Mi lèngè leidó</i> | <i>My lèngè leidó</i> |
| <i>Zè tei den</i> | <i>Zè is in there</i> |
| <i>Mi lèngè leidó.</i> | <i>My lèngè leidó.</i> |
- 31 Interview Gerardo Rosario (born 1877), Brenneker/Juliana, 1958 (Zikinzá-collection, T 45, NatAr).
- 32 Sung by Martili Pieters (born 1900, Banda Bou, T 11 and T 13); Martili Pieters in Guene (T 14); Francisco Conquet (born 1882, Veeris, T 654); Janchi Doran (born 1886, Wacawa, T 813); Damasio Hooi (born 1887, Dokterstuin, T 1409). Zikinzá-collection, NatAr.
- 33 Interview Nicolaas Petrona (born 1898), Allen, 20-5-1989 (NatAr).
- 34 Rosalia 1997:17.
- 35 Interview Erquiles Martes (born 1899), Brenneker/Juliana, 7-10-1976 (T 44 and T 45, Fundashon Biblioteka Públiko Kòrsou).
- 36 Interview Eduardo Tokaai (born 1899), Allen, 12-9-1984 (NatAr).
- 37 Interview Joos Marta (born 1885, Wacawa), Brenneker/Juliana, 1959 (Zikinzá-collection, T 815, NatAr).
- 38 Unable to translate.
- 39 Unable to translate.
- 40 Compare the Akan proverbs 'Biribiara nsi kwa' (Nothing just happens) and 'Biribirara won e se nti' (Everything has its 'because of') (Gyekye 1987:82).
- 41 Story told by Virginia Meulens (born 1869; Zikinzá-collection, T 437, NatAr).
- 42 Song sung by Gerardo Rosario (born 1877), living in Banda Riba (Zikinzá-collection, T 759 and T 760, NatAr).
- 43 Interview Clementine Kirindingo (born 25-10-1878), Brenneker/Juliana, 27-9-1977 (T 54, Fundashon Biblioteka Públiko Kòrsou).
- 44 Indigents were former slaves who received money from the government because they were unable to work.
- 45 NA, Ministerie van Koloniën, 1850-1900, inv. no. 6788, 25-4-1891/234.
- 46 Most of these songs were called *kantika di piki* and were sung during digging activities. During the harvest celebration several would be transformed by changing the tune or the rhythm to

- accommodate the procession (Rosalia 1989). ‘Work songs encourage me to work’, said an informant who considered himself a good lead-singer as he did not sing *wadjo*, a term referring to the singing of someone who cannot lead the rhythm of the song to correspond with the work activity. Those digging the holes with the hoe or with a pickaxe also had to know how to keep the rhythm or else they would be sent to do other work (Interview Nicolaas Petrona (born 1898), Allen, 20-5-1989 (NatAr).
- 47 Interview Andres Didi Sluis (born 1904), Allen/Ernest Gaari, 3-4-1984 (NatAr). See also song sung by Gerardo Rosario (born 1877; Zikinzá-collection, T 315, NatAr).
 - 48 Interview Andres Didi Sluis (born 1904), Allen/Ernest Gaari, 29-3-1984 (NatAr).
 - 49 *La Cruz*, 28-4-1915.
 - 50 Or people would play a game called *speelchi*. This was played after twelve o’clock on the ninth day and revolved around a cat trying to catch a mouse (Zikinzá-collection, T 530, NatAr).
 - 51 NatAr, Archief van het Gouvernement, Rol van Strafzaken 1878, Procesverbaal no. 24.
 - 52 The term ‘sabi’ was used for different purposes, for example to refer to people with knowledge of medicinal herbs and to people who knew how to solve social conflicts.
 - 53 Interview Chilin Martes (born 8-11-1916), Brenneker/Juliana, 22-9-1983 (T 85, Fundashon Biblioteka Públiko Kòrsou).
 - 54 Crested bobwhite.
 - 55 Interview Victor Bartolomeo (born 1935), Allen/La Croes, 1-5-2000 (personal collection).
 - 56 Interview Teodoor Coco (born 1886), Brenneker/Juliana, 1959 (Zikinzá-collection, T 648, NatAr).
 - 57 Interview Simon Bonifacio (born 1907), Allen, 9-5-1989 and 16-5-1989 (NatAr).