

# Calypso and Cultural Commodification in Aruba

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## **Abstract**

This research analysed the phenomenon of cultural commodification through the lens of Calypso music on the Dutch Caribbean island of Aruba. The aim was to explore the relationship between (mass) tourism and intangible cultural heritage (Calypso), and the potential beneficial or detrimental effect the former may have had on the latter. The research was an ethnographic case study comprised of interviews with local musicians and cultural producers in order to obtain their insights and perceptions on the matter. The research revealed that tourism has had no direct impact on Calypso. However, indirectly the island began a process of commercialisation owing to the presence of large multi-national corporations, such as large hotel chains, to cater for the tourism industry. This commercialisation had a domino effect on Aruban society, and incited a trend of commodification from which Calypso did not elude.

## **Key Words**

Calypso, cultural commodification, tourism, intangible culture, reflexive ethnography, grounded theory, dynamic culture.

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# A Introduction

The Dutch Caribbean island of Aruba draws in hundreds of thousands of tourists annually with its beautiful white sandy beaches, crystal clear turquoise water and friendly locals. This vacation experience is neatly packaged in the “One Happy Island” mantra and sold to predominantly American tourists who seek that “away from it all” feeling. Tourism on the island grew exponentially since the mid twentieth century, and is now the main driver of the Aruban economy accounting for 70% of the GDP (Travel & Tourism 2015). Mass tourism has placed Aruba (like other holiday destinations) in an invidious position of striking a fine balance between economic imperatives, and the conservation of its tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Creating a harmonious equilibrium between both is an increasingly salient issue as the tourism industry has become more competitive due to air travel becoming more affordable, with flight possibilities to endless destinations. The island must set itself apart from other Caribbean islands in order to keep the flow of tourists coming. Aruba and tourism find themselves in a Catch 22 scenario: the island relies on tourism to be economically viable but tourism is increasingly dependent on the preservation of culture on the island. It is a widespread global market practice to package a culture, including the intangible, to offer tourists the authenticity they desire. Ironically, in the case of Aruban Calypso music it is only by coming as a tourist the island that one can experience the unique cultural artefact of Aruban Calypso since commercialisation and distribution of the music is virtually non-existent.

This paper looks at the topic of cultural commodification through the lens of Calypso music (intangible culture) on the island of Aruba. The aim is to explore whether there is a relationship between Calypso and cultural commodification from the cultural producers- the local Aruban musicians- point of view. If so, what are the projections for the future of Calypso on the island and what steps must be taken to protect and preserve the art form.

## A.1 History of Calypso

The Caribbean has a rich and complex history, one which is reflected in Calypso. Many contemporary cultural features throughout the Caribbean islands are a result of the dark history of slavery. Calypso has its roots in Western African “songs of derision” (Van Dam 1954; 54) which were sung by local troubadours or “Griots” (Tang 2012; 79). The Oxford English Dictionary defines derision as “contemptuous ridicule or mockery” (Oxford English Dictionary; 2017). The songs were at times so powerful that the intended victim would financially bribe the local troubadour not to sing them. Griots (Tang 2012; 79) were central figures in West Africa for over seven centuries acting as oral historians, praise singers, specialised musicians, genealogists and storytellers. The first records of Griots, also known as “hereditary artisans of the spoken word” (Tang 2012; 79) date back to 1352/53. Ibn Battuta, a North African traveller, wrote down his encounter with the Griots of the king of Malis court. Griots’ purpose was to transmit the genealogy and history of their patrons, typically kings and nobility, through the medium of “music and verbal art” (Tang 2012; 79). Due to their ability to both criticise and praise, Griots have traditionally held a socially ambiguous position, being both feared and revered.

Slaves brought songs of derision along the Middle Passage from West Africa to the Caribbean. It is important to mention that each Caribbean island did in fact have an indigenous population, which was largely decimated by the arrival of the colonial powers prior to the importation of slaves. To paraphrase Mintz in his book *Sweetness and Power*, the shift of the production process to the New World colonies, meant that slave labour was the crux upon which sugar production, and ultimately consumption, was built (Mintz 1985). The Caribbean islands were embedded in the Atlantic Triangle Trade, whereby manufactured goods were brought to Africa and traded for slaves. The slaves were subsequently brought to the New World colonies to work in the plantations, and the commodities produced from this- such as sugar in the case of the Caribbean- were exported back to Europe.

Slave masters forced their chattel to work in fields planting and cultivating sugar cane and other commodities desired by Western consumers. These plantations were the arenas for the performance of songs of derision. Through their songs, slaves cast “satirical aspersions upon their owners” (Van Dam 1954; 53) and gave warnings to each other in their tribal dialect mixed with their master’s language. This mixture resulted in the development of many of the patois languages of the British West Indies, the French Creole in Haiti, the Papiamentu of Curacao and Takie Takie of Suriname. This process of creolisation resulted in the development of Calypso, a distinctly Caribbean

form of songs of derision. New Orleans Blues for instance is also thought to originate from songs of derision, but developed into its current form due to the availability of brass instruments not present in the Caribbean. Although, Blues and contemporary Calypso sound vastly different, they share the characteristic of having a double meaning only understood by the initiated individual. Just as Calypso developed from songs of derision sung in the fields, the blues were often based on the "hollers" (Van Dam 1954; 54) of field slaves and were satirical in nature. An initiated individual would have thus been a slave working in the fields, someone of the subculture which was constructed in reaction to the slave-master paradigm.

Under colonial rule, the slaves were stripped of their history, ancestry, and culture. The central aim was to deprive them of all that made them human so as to quell any chance of rebellion and create an entirely submissive free workforce. All forms of African music, language and religion were banned. However, as it did not (at that time) include any instruments and thus didn't break any rule, Calypso was a tool of resistance against the slave masters. It was a means of personal expression and freedom; a way to free the mind from the enslaved body. Individuals who performed Calypso gave themselves a stage name usually involving an important title of nobility such as King, Queen, Lady or titles of empowerment such as Mighty. By doing so, the Calypsonians gained notoriety, importance, and respect from their community. Through Calypso, they were reborn as a person of status, regaining the very essence, which the slave masters had denied them.

The island of Trinidad is said to be the birthplace of contemporary Calypso music. When the first slaves arrived on the island, it was part of the Spanish Empire. The British Empire annexed the island in 1797, ten years before the British Parliament abolished slavery.

During this interim period, many French planters came to the island escaping Haiti, which had banned all whites upon gaining independence in 1803. The use of African drums and native languages were banned on the island, resulting in the development of Calypso in French Creole as a means to satirise the French masters. Across the Caribbean, and indeed in the United States, slave communities used cunning methods to evade the cruel iron fist of their masters. In the British Virgin Islands secret meetings would take place in the hills. A dance circle would form around a woman called "queen" whom would air the gossip and scandals of the community. This form of Calypso became known as "Bamboula" and spread worldwide after slavery was abolished. In New Orleans, for instance, each Sunday the slave community gathered and played the Congo Square. Having a day off was an exceptional case, Louisiana

being the only state that granted this and also the only state, which allowed slaves to play music. There is a school of thought, which believes jazz evolved from the Congo Square; as such it was where jazz was conceived not born.

Each island population developed its own form of Calypso, characterized by different tempos and beats used to accompany the spoken words. For instance, in Trinidad the main rhythm is paseo, a medium fast rumba. This is due to the inevitable influence of South American music, Trinidad being in very close proximity to the mainland. In Jamaica, they use mento which has a faster tempo than Trinidad's paseo. In Puerto Rican Calypso, the artists follow plenas and seis demicas, both of which being heavily influenced by Andalusian Flamencos. This is a consequence of the islands protracted colonial attachment to Spain. The different rhythms and particular style of delivery make Calypso on each island unique. The main characteristics of Calypso are the use of archaic and synthetic words, the compressing of many syllables into short sentences, the paramount importance of rhyming but also the free conception of rhyming. Trinidadian Calypsonian Gorilla demonstrates this clearly in his own Calypso (see appendix 1.A).

During the Second World War, Calypso music was introduced into mainstream popular music with the song "Rum and Cola" by Rupert W Grant, professionally known as "Lord Invader". This local Trinidadian Calypsonian wrote a song about the war time period on the island when US troops were stationed there to protect the British colony from Nazi invasion. The soft drink was mixed with the locally distilled rum and became a popular drink for soldiers and locals alike. Just like the songs of derision the Calypso song "rum and cola" had a double meaning. It alluded to the popular mix drink of rum and Coca Cola but also was a guiding metaphor of the two sugar based liquids (one North American and one Caribbean) swirling together in one drink just like the American soldiers mixed with the young women of the island. This heady mixture was related in the first verse. (See appendix 2.A)

"Rum and Cola" met with such success that Americas favourite female singing band of that epoch, the Andrew Sisters, made a recording of the song. The musical genre grew in popularity and the prominent jazz singer Ella Fitzgerald sung a famous Calypso called "stone cold dead in the market". To this day, Calypsonians hold an important place in Caribbean island societies wherein annual competitions are held during the carnival season with a king and queen being elected based on their performances. This title yields considerable power in terms of future musical prospects such as recording opportunities, television and radio ads and modelling contracts.

Each island has its own unique style due to local customs and the musical

influences of the different ethnicities present. Although there is a common thread running through Caribbean music due to constant interactions and interchange of ideas between the islands, the United States also have a large influence on Calypso through radio, Internet, records and, television. Music is undoubtedly dynamic and very open to external influences and highly influential and Calypso is no exception. The following section A.1.2 will provide the historical background of Calypso on Aruba.

## A.2 Calypso and Aruba

The history of Aruba and Calypso began in the 19th century, far later than other Caribbean islands due to certain crucial historical factors. The island was originally inhabited by pre-ceramic Indians from approximately 2500 BC until 8500 BC, whereupon Caquetio Indians from northwestern Venezuela arrived. In 1499, the Spanish discovered Aruba, Bonaire, and Curacao, labelling them “Islas Inutiles” (useless islands) due to the lack of precious metals. The Spanish deported many of the islands inhabitants to work in the mines on Hispaniola. Aruba was primarily used for cattle breeding and wood cutting. In 1636, the Dutch West Indian Company (VOC) took over Aruba. However, sugar cane could not be grown on the island due to poor soil, and therefore no large workforce was needed to work in the plantation. For this reason, slavery on Aruba was less prominent than many other islands. Slavery never exceeded over 21% of the population (Alofs 2008; 12). This explains why there is less Afro-Caribbean culture on Aruba than on other islands such as Haiti where slavery accounted for 87% of the population (Blackburn 2006; 645). In 1792, when the West Indian Company dissolved and the island was rapidly colonised with the Aruban elite gaining control and privatising land. According to Heinze & Alofs (1997) the elite operated mainly in commercial agriculture and trading with South America with the peasants surviving off of small-scale fishing and agriculture. Less than a hundred years later in 1863, slavery was abolished and 492 slaves were freed (Alofs 2008; 12). The island’s economy was never a plantation economy, and so in lieu developed a peasant culture. Colonists, Indians and individuals of African descend mingled, giving rise to the Mestizo Creole population. Under this interracial mixing and coupled with immigration, the population grew from 1,723 to 9,023 (Alofs 2008; 12) between 1816-1923 (Alofs 2008; 12). In 1920, the Lago oil refinery opened in the bay of San Nicolas, at the far southern tip of the island. Standard Oil of New Jersey had a vast holding of oil under Lake Maracaibo in nearby Venezuela and needed a bay which large shipping containers could enter to bring in the crude oil. Standard Oil decided on Aruba as another oil company, Shell, was already on

Curacao and Venezuela was too politically unstable and prone to malaria. The oil refinery marked the beginning of industrialisation but also transformed the position of the island on a global level. Applying Wallersteins "World System Theory", Aruba became a semi-periphery country providing raw materials (oil) to the core countries. The core countries demand and need for oil supplied by Aruba created a dependency between the latter and the former, as this commercial exchange was economically vital to the island. The refinery caused a social rift within the traditional society and transformed the previously lenient racial hierarchy, as civil servants from the Netherlands, Surinam, managers from the United States and a large West Indian Caribbean workforce arrived on the island. This vast influx of immigration resulted in Aruba developing into a pluri-cultural society of over forty nationalities (Alofs 2008; 12).

In the wake of this mass West Indian immigration came Calypso. It is important to mention that the island was itself divided between "uptown" (San Nicolas) and "downtown" (Oranjestad); the former inhabitants were predominantly West Indian English speaking people and the latter almost entirely Dutch and Papiamentu speakers. The reason for this spatial linguistic division was the commercial position of Oranjestad under colonial rule -with Dutch being the language of operation- and the location of the refinery in San Nicolas, on the other side of the island, with a largely English speaking workforce housed close by resulting in English becoming the language spoken in that area. As such Calypso developed first in San Nicolas in "the village", the name given to the area where the workers resided. The Dutch and American refinery managers lived in "the colony," an all-white compound. The divide between both groups was delineated physically by a brick wall surrounding the compound, indicating the limit between the colony and the rest of San Nicolas, including "the village" (see appendix 3.A). Although this wall only separated the colony and the village, it can be seen as a metaphor for the entire island as the linguistic difference between uptown and downtown created an invisible division between people, cultures, and music.

Traditionally, Carnival across the Caribbean region has always been associated with Calypso however this was not the case in Aruba. Prior to the arrival of West Indian migrants, the elite had celebrated carnival in Oranjestad in a Dutch fashion. However, this changed with the arrival of the West Indian migrants. Although initially a subculture heavily associated with San Nicolas, Calypso over time became accepted into Aruban popular consciousness as part of the island identity, and was incorporated into carnival. The original style of Calypso remained, and continued to be sung in English in line with the tradition. Carnival and Calypso grew in popularity leading to the 1954 establishment of the SAC (Stichting Arubaanse Carnaval) with the mandate of

organising the numerous festivities and events.

Owing to the multi-cultural and multi-lingual society present in Aruba, Calypso developed in its own unique style. Along with a unique rhythm (drums from Tumba music) Aruban Calypsos are now sung in multiple languages: Dutch, Papiamentu and English. The unique multi-lingual aspect of Aruban Calypso is a manifestation of the pluri-lingual society of the island. Calypso is a mirror upon which society can reflect but also upon which society is reflected. Calypso, just like its musical siblings blues, jazz and reggae, defies the dominant narrative and hegemonic culture subtly so as to avoid large repercussions by the critiqued culture. Calypso in particular is the poor man's newspaper, the Calypsonian acting as a critical theorist who analyses the news in such a way as to make it accessible to all.

During the twentieth century, Aruba was working toward separating itself from the Kingdom of the Netherlands, which it had been part of since 1636 along with Curacao, Bonaire and the windward islands of Saba and, Sint Eustatius. In 1954, the Netherland Antilles were granted autonomy within the Dutch Kingdom. However after the 1960 rebellion on Curacao, Aruba pressed for a separate status (*status aparte*). In this way, Aruba became an autonomous part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1985. This decision was strengthened by the cultural and racial differences which exist between Aruba and the other islands. Calypso is one of these defining cultural differences. It is an expressive music form which conveys both personal and communal identity displaying pride, nationalism and solidarity resulting from oppression and collective enslavement. The period following the achievement of *status aparte* was marked by postcolonial identity search, which in turn accelerated the desire for cultural autonomy and brought about an interest in the historical, social, and cultural heritage of the island. In the midst of this political ferment, the island suffered a major setback when Exxon closed the Lago Refinery. This led to a surge in unemployment all over the island, but particularly in San Nicolas. The island's economic focus suddenly shifted from oil to tourism, which had slowly been growing since the 1950's and became the main pillar of the economy after 1985. Many Calypsonians spoke of the devastating impact of the refinery's closure in their songs. Indeed, the refinery was and, perhaps still is, perceived as a vital source of employment and economic stability. Calypsonian Lord Boxoe captures this sentiment in his calypso (see appendix 4.A) "God Bless Lago".

Tourism's demands on the hospitality sector brought another wave of immigration from the Americas, Caribbean, Netherlands and Philippines. The growth of tourism allowed the island to recover economically from the Lago setback. Although

the political and demographic ties with the former metropole are still strong, Aruba all along has been searching for an insular identity for the past century and continues to do so (Alofs 2008; 20). This identity is crucial for the island to market itself as a unique holiday destination in the Caribbean region, but also to define for themselves what it is to be Aruban and what that entails on a local and global level. Tourism has brought on a cultural renaissance in many Caribbean islands, including Aruba, stimulating the preservation of cultural heritage. Although less attractive than the white sandy tropical beaches, Aruban culture now too draws tourists from all over the world. The process though is not straightforward and can be complex as intangible cultural heritage is often carved into the imagination and popular consciousness of people, rather than a statically annotated description confined to a ledger on a library shelf.

### **A.3 Concept of Cultural Commodification**

In order to address the concept of “cultural commodification”, the following section will explain both notions of the phrase separately, followed by an elaboration of the overall concept. The first notion is culture, defined as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by [a human] as a member of society” (UNESCO, n.d.). All human beings pertain to a culture, or multiple cultures, as such culture is a central part of human life (Comaroff 2009; 26) . It is an unalienable part of being human as it is the basis for the construction of personal identity.

The second notion is commodification, which is explained as “the intensive sequestering of that production into the realm of commensurable exchange values” (Helgasson and Palsson 1997; 455). The process of commodification occurs when an object/cultural aspect is taken and turned into a commodity by placing a monetary value upon it. Thus, this commodity is brought into the sphere of commerce and exchange values and sold for an ascribed price.

It is important to note, that anything which exists in the world, whether tangible or intangible, can be swept up into this process and be transformed into a commodity. Human beings are not exempt from this process. There are countless examples of this in the music industry. The famous Reggae artist Bob Marley is a singularly pertinent example of the Caribbean and how a person, and their talent, can become a commodity: a marketable name and brand. The music industry appropriates (i.e. spots and approaches) a singer, signs them to a label, markets their music, look, and lifestyle emphasizing their USP- the commodity beloved of marketers- the unique

selling point. The music industry then charges incredibly large sums of money for the artist to perform, appear in ads and wear certain clothing brands. The music industry places the artist into the realm of exchange values, where the artists receive money for their performance. Bob Marley is no longer simply the name of an artist, but the brand name of a Jamaican coffee bean and smoking rolling papers. Through the commodification of the being of Bob Marley, the Rastafari culture and the colours associated with it have become a global symbol of marijuana and resistance to Western imperialism. The commodification of Bob Marley and the Rastafari community has highly simplified and misrepresented a complex social movement (Alleyne 1994). Commodification and commercialisation are often confused and used interchangeably. This confusion stems from the fact that both involve the marketing of a specific entity such as culture, music, or identity. Commercialisation is the build-up of commercial relationships surrounding the production of an activity, creativity or an object. Commodification is the placing of monetary value on an object, person or culture, thus transforming it into a commodity. The following section (A.2.1) will provide an in-depth explanation and analysis of the theory of cultural commodification according to the Comaroffs, supported by Bourdieus explanation of the process of commodification.

## B Background Theory

### B.1 Cultural Commodification

John and Jean Comaroff (2009; 26) state, “To be human is to have culture.” Human beings belong to one or more cultures either by ascribing it to themselves or having them ascribed onto them by externalities, such as their birthplace. Comaroff furthers this statement and expounds that cultural identity, or ethnicity, is thus an inalienable natural essence. An “ethnic consciousness” (Comaroff 2009; 26) is brought about from this strong sense of selfhood wherein individuals share a common ancestry and history. This cultural identity is articulated through “expressive culture” (Comaroff 2009; 26) such as dancing, music, singing, and clothing. The oldest artefacts found in archaeological sites across the world of drawing on cave walls, attest to the fact that cultures have always participated in “expressive culture” (Comaroff 2009; 26) and continue to do so to this day. The commodification of this “expressive culture” in the New World began with the European colonisation during the sixteenth century. This commodification concerned both the material and immaterial aspects of these exotic “Other” (Bourdieu 1995; 28) cultures.

While the decolonisation of the New World began with the Haitian Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century, most of the Caribbean would remain colonised until after the Second World War. The decolonisation process precipitated the First Peoples righteous demand for self-determination and reclamation of their culture. The shift in colonial power dynamics brought about a new form of travel from the metropole, moving from travel associated with duty to travel associated with leisure. Popular media in the metropole drove the West’s fascination with these newly independent countries. Alongside the traditional long established form of tourism of all-inclusive luxury hotel holiday packages, emerged an “ethnicity industry” (Comaroff 2009; 39) which mass markets cultures, languages, and rituals. Comaroff argues that this “ethno commerce” (Comaroff 2009; 39), has brought about opportunities for minority pop-

ulations to “enhance their autonomy, political presence and material circumstances” (Comaroff 2006; 28). Western culture continues to steer this process based on its conception of the exotic “Other,” (Bourdieu 1995; 28) notably emphasizing those cultural features, which are the “objectification of the already constituted taste of the producer” (Bourdieu 1993a; 231). In other words, the cultural features selected and packaged to the tourists are a result of the “habitus” (Bourdieu 1995; 28) of the consuming culture. For Bourdieu (1984), the consumption of culture is “predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfill a social function of legitimating social differences”(5). As such, the visiting culture dictates what it wishes to experiences, and in turn the “Other” (host culture) packages it and sells it to the visitor. By doing so, Bourdieu expounds, that a visible social difference is marked between the visiting culture with the financial means for leisure travel and the host culture, which can only offer what tourists want to experience.

Comaroff posits that this corporate interest is a medium through which these minority groups can in fact exhibit their culture, and by this process of international recognition may even cause cultural agents to find their “true self” (Comaroff 2006; 28). Comaroff puts forward a solid argument, but one which would only be a reality in a monitored environment wherein the cultural agents are actually part of the decision-making circle so as to ensure that the corporate interests would also be beneficial to the minority group. In an increasingly neoliberal world ruled by transnational corporations, these cases are few and isolated. In this vein, whilst corporate interest can provide minority groups with the socio-political platform to exhibit their culture it can also be fatal to the auratic value of the culture and thus the cultural agents themselves. Often this can result in features of a culture being appropriated, generally for economic gain. However, according to Comaroff cultural identity cannot be appropriated as “identity is part of the human essence, therefore it defies commodification” (Comaroff 2006; 29). As such, an intangible entity such as cultural identity, and individual identity, cannot be commodified because it is an intrinsic aspect of being human. This reasoning though fails to acknowledge the tangible aspects of a culture, which arise from cultural identity such as music and clothing; both of which can be appropriated, and sold.

That is not to say that all international exposure and corporate interest is corrosive to culture and cultural agents. However, the salient issue is the involvement of the agents in the process. The level of participation of the cultural producers will dictate the overall outcome. This outcome can be imagined as a spectrum, from one extreme being fatally commodified and commercialised to the other being successful integration into the world tourism market whilst retaining its cultural authenticity .

## B.2 Popular Culture Theory

Popular culture theory is an extensively studied and debated discipline worldwide. Despite this, there is not as yet a singular accepted definition of popular culture. Some argue that defining popular culture would be stripping the subject of its rich complexity and that any definition would be haunted by the absence of the “other” whose culture is being defined. Popular culture, as currently understood, only emerged after the industrialisation revolution and the subsequent period of urbanisation. This is due to three factors; firstly the employer- employee relationship changed from mutual dependency to one based entirely on the demands of the “cash nexus” (Storey 2009; 13). The second factor is the residential separation between the economic classes. Thirdly, the related fear of the French Revolution spreading, resulting in governments pushing radicalism underground in order to avoid the middle class being influenced by their ideas. Industrialisation and urbanisation redrew the cultural map, and created a new cultural space.

The people living in these cultural spaces were outside of the “paternalist consideration” (Storey 2009; 13) and out of the sphere of influence of the dominant class. Both these factors allowed for the birth of a new culture, separate to the already existing dominant one. This was the first instance of this phenomenon occurring, previously only one culture - the dominant one - had existed. This is what Benjamin Disraeli called the “birth of two nations” (Storey 2009; 13). As was pointed by Storey in his book *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* “whenever the dominant culture imposes itself upon the new culture it is culture itself, and not culture as a symptom or sign of something else, that becomes for the first time the actual focus of concern” (Storey 2009; 17). This leads to the question of defining popular culture. Cultural theorist Stuart Hall (2009) claims it is a site where “collective social understandings are created”, a terrain on which “the politics of signification” are played out in attempts to win people to particular ways of seeing the world (Storey 2009; 4). As such, popular culture is a contested lieu for political constructions of “the people” and their relation to the “power bloc” (Storey 2009; 11).

The definition becomes more complicated with Williams’ (1983) (Storey 2009; 4) four proposed meanings of the concept: “well liked by many people”; “inferior kinds of work”; “work deliberately setting out to win favour with the people”; “culture actually made by the people for themselves”. While Hall’s definition approaches the concept from a political angle, Williams suggests that popular culture is what is left over after what constitutes high culture has been decided. It encompasses all that has failed

to meet the set standards to qualify as high culture. This definition alludes to it being a mass-produced and commercial inferior culture in stark contrast to high culture, which is the refined result of a singular act of creation. In following with this reasoning, only the latter therefore, deserves a moral and aesthetic response.

Similarly to Hall, Gramsci (1979) perceives popular culture to be a site of hegemonic struggle between the “resistance” of subordinate groups and the forces of “incorporation” operating in the interests of dominant groups. Gramsci calls this “equilibrium of compromise” (Storey 2009; 10) wherein popular culture is a terrain marked by the interchange of incorporation and resistance. This process is dynamic; a culture will be viewed as popular but will then be incorporated into the dominant culture and thus contained and channelled into ideologically safe harbours (Storey 2009; 119).

Indeed, the classification of popular or high culture is not permanent and is in fact prone to change. William Shakespeare was considered a popular culture producer in his time, but is presently regarded as belonging to high culture. So too was Charles Dickens once a people’s writer, but now his works are commonly accepted as classics of high culture. Both Shakespeare and Dickens used their contemporary mainstream culture as the inspiration for their works, and turned it into popular culture. If one looks at popular culture holistically through the lens of Gramsci’s hegemony theory, it then becomes a terrain of ideological struggle between dominant and subordinate classes.

The notion of authenticity in culture is another point of contention in popular culture theory. There is a common belief that culture which originates from “the people” is “authentic” (Storey 2009; 8). In line with this notion, popular culture is thus positioned under the same banner as folk culture, “a culture of the people for the people” (Storey 2009; 8). However, according to Fiske (1983) “in capitalist societies there is no so-called authentic folk culture against which to measure the “inauthenticity” of mass culture, so bemoaning the loss of the authentic is a fruitless exercise in romantic nostalgia” (Storey 2009; 8). This perception of authenticity is often “equated with a highly romanticised concept of working-class culture construed as the major source of symbolic protest within contemporary capitalism” (Storey 2009; 9). This notion of culture by the people for the people raises the question of who is “the people” and, which individuals truly qualify to be part of it. In addition, what constitutes authenticity and its existential meaning remains unaddressed.

Ideologies such as capitalism, communism or any other “ism” attempt to make universal and legitimate what is in fact partial and particular by taking that

which is cultural and labelling it as natural. For instance, a white middle class male is “normal” according to Western capitalist hegemony and everything else is a deviation and “abnormal”. Other examples of this are terms given, such as female pop singer, a black journalist, a working-class writer: the first term is used to signal that the second is a deviation from the “universal” categories of pop singer, journalist and writer. Culture is no exception to this. Any culture that deviates from the dominant discourse- whose central aim is to “reproduce the social conditions and social relations necessary for the economic conditions and economic relations” in order to maintain that ideology - will be labelled as resistant until it has been sanitised by the dominant ideology and essentially commodified into such a culture which “fits” into the ideological paradigm desired by the dominant culture.

In this vein, popular culture can be considered an ideological machine that effortlessly reproduces the dominant structures of power through the calculated steering of the hegemonic discourse. Although this may be a reality, Richard Maltby (1989) posits a strong argument for the creative value of popular culture, “if it is the crime of popular culture that it has taken our dreams and packaged them and sold them back to us, it is also the achievement of popular culture that it has brought us more and more varied dreams than we could otherwise ever have known” (Maltby as quoted in Storey 2009; 9). Indeed, the subcultures absorbed into the mainstream dominant culture have contributed invaluable to the former, however it has been at the cost of their very essence and people.

### **B.3 Reflexive Ethnography**

According to interpretive anthropologists, the field of anthropology is not so much an experimental science as “an interpretive one in search of meaning” (Watson 1987; 29). The researcher will not be afflicted by “errors of observation because he himself is the instrument of observation” (Michrina 2000; 213) and thus has the capacity of introspection and ability to reflect on experience.

Reflexive ethnography is not simply engaging in self-reflection but a central property discourse, the “ways in which the products of research are affected by the personnel and process of doing research”; (Michrina 2000; 212). This includes oneself into the meta narrative of ethnography, using George Mead’s me in order to reflect on ones individual experience. Reflexivity is the framework in which ethnographic research<sup>1</sup> is

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<sup>1</sup>Appropriate ethnographic research requires an object of study, that is, a social phenomenon or structured theoretical inference and generalization; evaluation by a critical scholarly community; evaluation by

conducted; it is the “property of accounts, which are intentional communications that describe features of a situation” (Michrina 2000; 213). Reflexivity provides not only a description of a situation but is in fact embedded within it (Michrina 2000; 213).

Reflexive ethnography exists on a continuum and there are levels of reflexivity that can be present in an account. This will result in the ethnography appearing more personal, biased and culture bound. However, it is humanly impossible to detach ourselves from our culture as it inevitably permeates into our thoughts and reflections. Whilst this issue cannot be entirely circumvented, the researcher can however state these biases so as to provide a complete ethnography that demonstrates sound methodology. In so doing, the anthropologist will become “as much the question as the questioner” (Watson 1987; 33). Reflexive ethnography allows for the silence and the indescribable within us to be expressed through the medium of *Homunculus mundus*, the world mirror, by showing the stories of humanity.

## **B.4 Grounded Theory**

Grounded theory is a general research method for developing theories, which is grounded in data that is systematically gathered and analysed. The theory will constantly evolve throughout the research phase, through the back- and-forth exchange between theory and data analysis. Grounded theory research involves “generating theory and doing research as two parts of the same process” (Strauss and Corbin 1994; 273) and results in grounded theory, or grounded description of the data. Grounded theory is commonly used in the social sciences and thus employs the same source of data as other qualitative research methods. These methods include interviews, field observations, written documents of any kind (diaries, newspapers, autobiographies, biographies, historical accounts) and video footage. Grounded theory does deviate from other theories in that it is explicitly “interpretative” (Strauss and Corbin 1994; 274) work and must therefore include the perspective and voice of the research participants. This is necessary as it provides an understanding of the actions and thoughts of the participants. Grounded theory mirrors the central understanding of reflexive ethnography because the researcher needs to accept the responsibility of their interpretive role and assume the further responsibility of interpreting the data.

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the subjects of the study; reflexive candor and transparency in writing; and mediation of tensions within the research project caused by different frames of research” (Michrina 2000; 212).

## **C Research Question**

*How do local musicians perceive the impact of tourism on Calypso in Aruba?*

# D Methodology

## D.1 Position as researcher in Aruba

Owing to the very nature of Anthropology and conducting ethnographic fieldwork, it is important to state the potential biases that a researcher can create, which will be thus reflected in the research. I am a Caucasian Irish female who grew up in Belgium. Despite, having travelled extensively all over Europe, Australia and South East Asia, and being exposed to many different cultures and people, I was educated in Western Europe. My western education is in itself a potential bias as my opinions and approach to ethnographic research may be inadvertently and unconsciously tinged with Eurocentrism. As such, it is salient to acknowledge the role the researcher plays in shaping the information they receive, which will frame the ethnography (Edwards and Holland 2013). Although aware of this, it is almost impossible to remove any preconceived notions as personal opinions are the result of ones upbringing and experiences. Moreover, my physical appearance may too create a bias.

In a similar vein, political ideals can influence ones research. As such, I will state that I am more inclined to left -wing viewpoints. This research will be framed in a reflexive ethnographic manner that will include an analysis of wider structures of power and control. I will include my own analyses and thoughts on my experience researching Calypso. From this, I will construct my analyses in interaction with the field in an iterative-inductive way. I will provide an account, acknowledgment and disclaimer that this research is only a small part of a larger picture, perhaps fallible but nonetheless relevant in the holistic representation of cultural commodification. Concerning the field of Anthropology, I believe that fieldwork conducted must be beneficial primarily for the culture being studied and ideally also for the researcher's culture. The research should not be a means for potential exploitation of the specific culture being studied, but rather an addition to the knowledge of world cultures.

## D.2 Field Research

I began researching this subject several months prior to arriving in Aruba by reading literature on the subject of Calypso. A large majority of the existing literature on the subject of Calypso was from various islands around the Caribbean but not Aruba itself; in fact, there appeared to be paucity of written works on the subject. This led me to the decision to gather ethnographic qualitative data allowing me to create a written record of Aruban Calypso, formulated by Arubans themselves. This constituted the first phase of my research. The second phase began when I arrived in Aruba. I attended a talk on Calypso and met several future interviewees, all of whom are local Arubans. From these first few encounters, using the snowball method I met many more participants and was invited to Calypso events. The interviews consisted of semi-structured, open-ended questions, as the intent was to gather various personal perspectives. The time and place of the interview was decided by the participant in order to make the overall tone and feeling relaxed and informal. By doing so, I was exposed to many different sides of the island; gaining a wider view of the culture and the diversity of Aruban society has aided in furthering my understanding of the research subject.

Additionally, four simple open-ended questions were prepared:

1. Background of participant
2. How did you discover/get into Calypso?
3. Has it/how has it changed since you were first introduced?
4. What are your thoughts about Calypso future? Should measures be taken to protect and preserve it? What is your opinion on Calypso being placed on UNESCO's intangible cultural heritage list?

In total, five interviews were conducted, two of which were discussions with two or more participants. The fifth interview was subsequently retracted by the participant due to professional privacy concerns. Each interview was recorded and notes were taken throughout. During these discussions, an assistant took notes so as not to distract the participants. The interviews are based on each individual's respective experience of Calypso music on Aruba, focusing on whether and how they perceive Calypso to have been commodified over the years. Questions also focused on the interviewees' predictions for the future of this art form. Thus, the human tone is more important to this research than a rigorous research design. More specifically, the

emphasis will be put on the experience of the cultural producer rather than the tourist. In conjunction with running interviews, I conducted participant observation. Due to arriving during the month of January, Carnival festivities were already in full swing and open to the public. I attended numerous Calypso events including the semi-final and final of the annual Calypso contest, as well as the annual Jouve morning, carnival parades and a “welcome” cultural event for tourists in the capital city. In order to gain deeper insight into Aruba and Aruban society and their relation with Calypso, I attended events all over the island. The third phase to my research involved the transcription of the interviews, each of which were on average over an hour and a half in duration. Subsequently, each interview was analysed. The interview material was not coded using qualitative analysis software but was classified chronologically. This approach allowed for a wide range of complexities and subtleties to be present in the analysis.

### **D.3 Analysis of data**

The analysis process began with transcribing all interviews. Subsequently, the interview material was classified into chronological time periods. The reflexive methodology was followed: concept development, potential sampling pool, data collection, data analysis, and interpretation. Coding using a software was disregarded from this process, as the complexities and human element emerging from the data was preferred. Ethnographic content analysis (ECA) was used in order to document and understand the communication of meaning, as well as to verify theoretical relationships. The goal was to be both systematic and analytic, but not rigid in order to continuously discover and compare situations, settings, styles, images and nuances (Altheide 1987; 68). A combination of structured data collection (based on protocol) and ethnographic field notes were combined to support a theoretical framework. Present in the analysis is poly-vocality and dialogue, allowing thus the characters to speak for themselves whilst providing a backdrop of interpretation to make the statements relevant to the research subject (Yallup 2012). A potential bias is the lack of female representation in the sample due to want of contact opportunities. However, this poses a relatively small bias as Calypso is a largely male dominated sphere and more significantly the research topic focuses on cultural commodification and not gender relations within the culture. Each of the participants remain anonymous, but are given pseudo names to allow for the analysis and meta-narrative to flow.

## E Data Analysis and Results Presentation

In the following section, I will present my data analysis and findings. Owing to the ethnographic nature of the research, this will be put forward as a meta-narrative. The result of this study will be presented in a chronological order. Calypso will be traced by decade from its arrival in the 1920's to the present day. In doing so, information I have gathered from conversations and interviews I have had with calypso musicians will be grouped together in these decades. The physical characteristics of interviewees, the context in which data was collected and my subsequent personal reflections will be described and discussed. In addition, when possible Calypso lyrics specific to that period will be added to mirror the research (in line with the music's original purpose). As such, it will be in essence a story of the research, the researcher and the participants.

My first interview took place in a café in Santa Cruz with soft background jazz playing. This café was not unlike what one would find in any European city, offering western style food the likes of smoothies, brunches, and Prosecco on the menu. Over lunch with local young Calypsonian and artist (for anonymity purposes referred to as Edwin), a dreadlocked man in his thirties, who began explaining the first record of Calypso presence in the Caribbean. It was an actual Calypso song that spoke of the Iron Duke (a war time boat) reaching the shores of Trinidad. This approximately dated back to the turn of the 19th century. He continues and states, "I would like to think that Caiso<sup>1</sup> is a creolisation of Griot." This notion of Creole, or creolisation is something entirely unique to the Caribbean and was formed in the context of discrimination and deprivation of African descent. Just like Aruban culture being a mix of many cultures, the official language Papiamentu is a creole language. Calypso and Papiamentu are living forms of creolisation, and, according to Edwin\*, are central to the identity of Arubans. It provides them with a means to differentiate themselves from the rest of the Caribbean islands, and create a recognisable unique identity amongst other world

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<sup>1</sup>Calypso is the mother music of the New World, and Caiso is closest to the original art form of Griots from West Africa. It denounces, criticises and pokes fun at society, and individuals. It has a slower tempo than its musical sister Socca.

cultures.

Prior to arriving in Aruba, I spent many hours researching Calypso and its historical relationship with the island. Although there is scarce literature on the subject, one historical fact I kept coming across was the opening of the Lago oil refinery in 1920, which marked the arrival of Calypso to Aruba. The refinery required many workers and thus a large immigration influx came from the British West Indian Caribbean islands, and with them West Indian food, music and clothing. The workers settled in “the village” in San Nicolas, which is now commonly known as the place where Carnival begun “with pots and pans and grew and grew” (Peter, personal communication, February 19 2017) into its current form. The famous local Calypsonian, Mighty Reds captures this in his song (see appendix 5.A). At the time however there existed a divide within the town; Edwin\* mentions the physical separation of the “colony” and “village” and expresses what he feels was a form of racial segregation on the island. This racial segregation was briefly discussed, and Edwin\* resumes promptly to the interview topic and names the first Calypso kings on the island: Paul Connor, Lord Boxoe, Quicksilver and Lord Cobashi.

After searching for the lyrics, I could not obtain any commercial recording of the songs or published lyrics online or archived in the library. Sam\*<sup>2</sup> explained that is could be due to the changing organizational parties in charge of Calypso, and Carnival through out the year; originally it was SAC (Stichting Aruba Carnival) then it changed to SMAC (Stichting Musica Aruba Carnival). During this change, it seems neither the lyric records, nor the previous archiving system used was transferred over. I came to realise this is not viewed so much as a problem by the community, but more of a reality in that Calypsos are lived through people and not on paper. Moreover, the scarcity of available recordings adds to the exclusivity and rarity of Aruban Calypso.

When I did my transcription and analyses of my data, it emerged that the twenty-year period of 1940-1950 was omitted in conversation. The limited literature on the period indicates that this was a period of relative peace and prosperity on the island with the booming oil refinery being central to life and the tourism industry starting to flourish. Tourism was situated almost entirely downtown in the capital city and did not cross over into the realm of Calypso, which was concentrated uptown in San Nicolas (see appendix 6.A). As such, an assumption can be made that Calypso art form was thriving in San Nicolas amongst the West Indian community. At the Calypso contest semi-final, I had a chance meeting with two Calypsonian performers and brothers, who

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<sup>2</sup>Calypsonian and local band member interviewed during focus group in San Nicolas on May 15, 2017.

agreed to be interviewed. At their suggestion, I met the local Calypsonian brothers at a newly opened brightly blue and green painted Caribbean restaurant located within sight of the Lago refinery in San Nicolas. The view fitted the topic of the interview, and added a historical aspect. The brothers appear to be in their late sixties. The younger sibling -whose stage name is Mighty Reds- is a tall and distinguished man, a famous musician and multiple-time Calypso King title winner. The elder sibling, Mighty Cisco, is a slightly smaller man and more reserved and quiet than his younger sibling, sitting back in his chair contently listening to his brother talk.

According to them, Calypso was booming in the 1960's. Growing up, however, they could not sing Calypsos at home as they would get reprimanded for their inappropriate content. This is analogous to any new genre of music emerging and clashing with the older generation's taste and morals. In Britain and many other countries, The Beatles music caused tremendous controversy. A contributing factor to this clash is religion and Aruban society was, and is still is, Christian. While, Calypso was intrinsically linked to the West Indian community and to the more traditional Aruban culture, the lyrics were at times regarded as unsavoury. This clash between Calypso and traditional culture is inevitable because one is denouncing the other, and can bring to the surface uncomfortable realities. Indeed, as Edwin\* said of his own Calypsos "I will slap reality into you with a smile". If one understands Calypso to be a mirror upon which society is reflected; then the freedom allowed to the Calypsonian places them in a liminal position within the community. This liminality lies in the power Calypsonians hold to denounce and critique society, and individuals. Just like the Griots, the Calypsonian is both feared and revered. Name mentioning, and recounting of social issues comically through a skilful rhyming scheme is all permitted in Calypsos. Edwin\* put it clearly "Calypso always spoke about the political situation on Aruba, about the social situation, always, always, always Its un- inhibited and tells a story informatively."

In 1970, Calypso was still almost entirely confined to San Nicolas, and if it was heard downtown in Oranjestad, it was being played by West Indian people. However, it slowly became a part of Carnival as well as Aruban life; according to Edwin\* "uptown always had more fire" which drew people from all over the island and thus gave it exposure. Social gatherings in San Nicolas always included some form of live music whether reggae, soul and/or Calypso, the latter being extremely popular. As suggested by Peter\* and John\*, to become a Calypsonian is to become a performer of the art form. The process involves writing a Calypso - sometimes in collaboration with someone or a band - signing up, and performing the song at the annual Calypso contest. As such, a Calypsonian trains himself through practice, and continuous performances.

The Calypso brothers reflected on their first ever Calypso performances. The younger brother, John\* first Calypso was titled "no grass, no mass" which alluded to the fact that if there was no marijuana there would be no crowd. John\* laughs, brushing the lyrics off as being young. This accurately captures the lack of inhibition that exists within Calypso, as such speaking about illegal drugs is permissible.

According to John\*, the Calypso contest in those days "was smaller scale, simple stage no big stage like this they had no much light, and a few bulbs and the nice thing about it is they had a trailer, two trailer backs back side each other and pimp it up and paint up and put a few lights". Although the annual Calypso event still takes places in the park, it has been entirely rebuilt recently and the actual performance aspect has also changed a lot. The audience would be sat in bleachers and the artists would make their entrance through the crowd on to the stage, hyping them up as they walk through just like a boxer would at a big match. John\* recalls this moment smiling, "they call your name and you come dancing through the crowd people raaaah like when you see boxers and you come out dancing because the band is playing your song and people are going crazy or not if the people dont know you then you go on stage and start to sing". The audience was entirely comprised of members from the West Indian community in San Nicolas: the refinery workers and their families. As such, all the Calypsos were in English as the audience only spoke English, you had to come into the English slang for them to understand that was great, the older brother Peter\* noted. The use of English meant that it was exclusive to the people of San Nicolas, as the Dutch and Papiamentto-speaking population of Oranjestad didnt understand Caribbean English. It is part of human nature to remember fondly what has happened in the past, to wash the memories over with rosy nostalgia. Recalling those events years ago, John\* continued, "it was really simple small but very joyful it was good."

The closing of the refinery marked a new chapter for Calypso on Aruba. When in the mid 1980's the refinery closed, it meant many of the workers left, amongst them talented Calypso singers. Three members of Peters\* band who had worked at the refinery left, two to the Netherlands and one to the island of St Maarten. By this point Calypso had become popular music through out the island, played all year round at parties and on Baba Charlies radio show. The Calypso and Roadmarch contest was a once a year opportunity for up and coming bands to get exposure through the medium of Calypso. John\* recalls that "you had to play calypso for the band to get the lift and we did and the band got a lift we didnt really win, but we got popular." That year Peter\*, at request of his brother John\*, performed his first calypso. The song in fact was

about John\* sending Peter\* a letter asking him to perform for the band (see appendix 7.A). From this debut, Peter's\* Calypso career took off. A couple of years later, Peter\* went on to win the title Calypso and Roadmarch King in 1980, with his song "Aruban names" (see appendix 8.A) which became a classic. In true Calypso style, the lyrics were accused of being explicit but in fact did exist in the Aruban telephone guide. As such in Calypso, the talent lies in cleverly and comically describing a social situation or phenomenon.

The contest also gave Calypso music genre a large exposure on the island amongst locals and immigrants alike. Sam\*<sup>3</sup>, band member of The Failures who moved to Aruba in 1980 from Grenada, recalls becoming involved in Calypso around this time by watching the contest from outside the park gates with his friends "we weren't really liking what we were hearing and we started being our own judges outside of the park started putting up a yes they can go on to the next round or a no." Sam and his friends thus decided to start writing and performing their own Calypsos.

Although it is an honour to win the title of Calypso and Roadmarch King and a pleasure to receive the significant prize money of approximately 550 guilders, it seems participation takes precedence over victory. Sitting across from me in the busy restaurant, Peter\* said "it wasn't interesting for me winning you know I just wanted to participate for people to hear that is the great thing about the final I didn't win and that's not the point." The brothers explained that winning also entails a lot of criticism from other Calypsonians and the community. However, even if you don't receive the title you may win over the crowd, which would lead to popularity and success for your band the coming year. The song content during that time was strictly about what was happening on the island, often a summary of the year's events. For instance, Peter\* along with his contemporaries such as Quicksilver, never sung about politics but only about local situations happening in the community. Until this time, Calypso was still heavily concentrated in San Nicolas.

From the 1990's until the present day will be looked at as one whole, as the participants noted much overlap between the time periods. In the 1990s, the annual Calypso event "The Calypso and Roadmarch contest" became the main musical attraction on the island. An official organisational body Stichting Aruba Carnival (SAC) was responsible for the contest and thus more funds were allocated to the event. Prior to this, the Tumba festival had been the annual attraction and large target of contestation for Calypsonians who poked fun at the Tumbadores. According to Matthew's\* inter-

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<sup>3</sup>Sam\* was interviewed during a focus group at a O'Neil's Caribbean kitchen in San Nicolas on May 17, 2017.

pretation of that era, in the 1980's the Calypsonian was fighting for his identity caught in the "we is culture" struggle and Calypsos were used as a means to gain recognition from the Aruban society. This was all occurring in conjunction with the boom in tourism on the island. The industry had exponentially grown since the 1950's to become the main driver of the economy. The whole of Aruban society began to look inwardly in order to find means by which to set themselves apart from the other islands, in order to draw more tourists with their unique attractions. This fell to culture and more precisely "authentic" culture. This was a reaction to the perceived desires of the millennial tourists. The baby boomers were getting older, and as Edwin\* stated, "if you're talking business you want the young market." Thus, the Minister of Culture tried to find that authentic identity and brand it and then sell that identity to the new potential tourists.

The notion of authenticity is elusive and subjective to the individual. Nonetheless, there is an overarching understanding of what "authenticity" is, that which is unique and genuine and of undisputed origin. However, the rise of "ethno-tourism" in the past two decades has resulted in every aspect of culture labelled authentic for economic reasons. Aruba is no exception to this wider pattern in the Caribbean region. Walking around downtown Oranjestad, with the Caribbean sea on one side and endless stream of shops - from luxury boutiques to crammed souvenir stalls - on the other, I came across countless signs advertising "authentic cuisine", "authentic Aruban souvenirs" and "authentic music." In a conversation with the Aruban UNESCO representative at the UNESCO office in downtown Oranjestad, we broached the subject of "authenticity" and what that entails. Lydia\* immediately declared that she didn't like the word and preferred "the slangs more you have raw copies the core business of something instead of the authentic." The question of authenticity was brought up during a focus group session in San Nicolas, at O'Niel's Jamaican kitchen. Sat around a table outside next to the main street in the warm evening, Sam\* a dreadlocked man in his fifties, and local musician in a Calypso band The Failures stated that to him it meant "being true to myself as much as you possible can and that is my way and that is what I want to portray out there" while for Edwin\* "it is a feeling so it can't be a thing, it's a real island feel." When I posed the same question to Matthew\*, leading academic scholar on Calypso, he responded, "how music hits the soul." Whether it be authenticity in culture, music, or even personal life, the notion of what is authentic appears to be the vehicle through which a sense of legitimacy is achieved.

Although, the type of Calypso played on the island is unique to Aruba, it has in the main not been included in the cultural branding process. Edwin\* explained that the only exposure tourists could possibly have to Calypso is through the medium of

hotels and this is dependent on the hotel engaging a musician who plays Calypso music. A club may play a famous dance Socca song such as "Lucy" by Destra (see appendix 9.A), but aside from this there is no real propagation of the music. Commercialisation of recordings of performances, or published music is at a very low level and virtually unobtainable thus giving a rarity aura to the genre. It appears there isn't a recording industry based around Calypso for either indigenous or export markets. Sam\* explained that it could be due to the changing organisational parties in charge of Calypso, and Carnival through out the year; originally it was SAC (stichting Aruba carnival) then it changed to SMAC (stichting musica Aruba carnival) during which some of the song lyric records may have gotten lost.

An important distinction to make is between carnival and calypso. Tourists flood the island during carnival seasons, and even participate in the road marches by paying a float to provide them with a costume and drinks during the parade. However, the music played during these parades is Socca<sup>4</sup>, the more up-tempo festive derivative of the mother music, and generally the lyrics are light hearted and aimed at having fun. Socca is not the poor man's newspaper, but the poor man's bacchanal (Edwin\* personal communication, February 14, 2017). This is true for the carnival in Oranjestad, but what of the Calypso contest in San Nicolas?

The roads were virtually empty leading to San Nicolas, and the streets were quiet. As we drove into the town, the sound of loud music playing in the distance indicated the whereabouts of the event. The car was parked a few blocks away because the streets, including the footpaths were full. The entire vicinity was crammed with people gathered around the park gates, a perfect vantage point to catch a glimpse of the show and enjoy the music without paying the pricey entrance fee. Equipped with camping chairs, cooler boxes, portable barbeques, the locals seemed prepared for a long evening of Calypso. After buying our tickets, and going through security (including a bag search) we walked in past several policemen, and their van, into the event. The stage was impressively large, and bright with all sorts of lighting effects. Almost directly in front of the stage, in the middle of the crowd, was the scaffolding construction, which was the judges' panel. The rest of the park was filled with various food stalls ranging from Aruban food to fast food. It was hard to ignore the over presence of the events sponsors - Digicel and Aruba Airport - with banners, and flyers and flashing foam lights handed out by representatives. I immediately noted that I was amongst a handful of non-local Arubans within a crowd of several hundred people. This is interesting as it was

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<sup>4</sup>Socca (musical sister of Caiso) is a fast, up-tempo derivative of Calypso fused with Indo-Caribbean music played at festive celebrations such as Carnival.

high season for tourism, with many tourists flocking to the island for the very purpose of Carnival celebrations and performances but yet very few were at the semi-final and final of the contest. In my interpretation, the split in Calypso between Socca being played at the Oranjestad carnival and Caiso being exclusively performed in San Nicolas is a result of the compromise made on Calypso for greater monetary value. The tourists seek the upbeat festive sound of Socca, which is heavily associated with Carnival all around the Caribbean. Thus, Socca is played during Carnival in Oranjestad for largely tourist crowds which generates money for the island. Whilst local Arubans also enjoy Socca - and indeed Socca is also played at the annual music contests, and at the carnival in San Nicolas - there is also a strong connection to Caiso, as it is songs about their culture, island and reality, which includes tourism. It seemed that, just as Edwin\* had stated, due to the lack of propagation of Calypso music downtown in the tourist area in Oranjestad, there was subsequently no advertising of the event, and thus very few tourists present. Just like the Calypso art form, the crowd reflected the multi-cultural society of Aruba, as locals of all ages participated in the upbeat festivity.

I asked the participants their thoughts on more tourists attending the Caiso and Socca Monarch contest; Peter\* laughed and said "they wouldn't understand half of what's going on but sometimes you don't have to be to be in an adventure be in the vibes, adding that "you have to live among the people to know." Lydia\* alluded to a potential reason for the lack of tourist interest is the fact that Aruba has few international Calypso stars to draw in international crowds.

Prior to conducting my research, my perception of the relationship between tourism and Calypso had been black and white, imagined on a spectrum from corrosive to positive. From my perspective, informed by my own political views and the reading of literature, I formed an opinion that tourism, particularly mass tourism involving large chain hotels and package tours, was fatal to culture. However, throughout the research process my stance became more blurred: mass tourism and cultural preservation were not as decisively negatively correlated. Indeed, it was unexpected that the sphere of Calypso and the sphere of tourism didn't encounter one another. I expressed this during the interviews, and asked the participants their thoughts on the matter. Many spoke of the commodification, which was supposedly happening from within the Calypso community itself. Their explanations began in the 1990's, when large corporations began sponsoring the Calypso event, impacting Calypso as a whole.

At the Caiso and Socca Monarch contest, Digitel and Aruba Airport advertisements continuously flashed on giant screens on either side of the stage. Sponsors have introduced larger cash flows into these annual contests. This is evidenced by

recently increased entrance fees, which contribute to the exclusivity of these events. Peter\* spoke about the impact of large sponsors of the event “theres is a difference now if you win then back then now you get 2000 guilders and I got 300.” John\* added, “I got second prize I got the 100 guilders and used it to buy a bottle of whiskey and sit in the yard and celebrate with everybody.” Peter\* recalls an occasion upon which the winner of both the Calypso and Roadmarch<sup>5</sup> contests only received 25 guilders, stating that “this is not right he had been supporting the whole carnival and the queen used to get car because they had big sponsors.” Although the presence of large sponsors changes the dynamics of the event, it isn’t an entirely bad development. Peter\* stated “now it’s much better and they pay more” thus the artists can cover the cost of their costumes and bands, and even make money from their performances. This is the tangible impact corporate sponsors have had upon the contest, bringing about its commercialisation.

A less obvious, intangible, impact of these sponsors has been the commodification of the music and lyrics itself. Calypso needs to have a good story expressed by a good storyteller who captures the imagination and feeling of everyone. This has changed. Aruba is unique in that a Calypsonian can perform with his own band, not an all-star band which performs with each singer. The content of contemporary calypsos has transformed, Peter\* stated, “I wouldn’t compose a song like they would I would pick up a different topic I would chose a more roots topic” as such the lyrics are reflecting the younger generations’ reality. The younger generation of Calypsonians are drawing inspiration from their experiences and putting these experiences in lyrical form in Calypsos. As such, Calypso is veering more toward its dance-based sibling Socca and further away from Caiso. A hypothetical factor behind this may be the presence of tourism, in combination with globalisation, is causing a homogenisation of culture wherein musical tastes are aligning; in this case tourists and now locals seek the same upbeat festive sound of Socca music, rather than Caiso. Peter\* suggested, “that we [the senior Calypsonians] can do nothing about because thats a new generation.” Moreover “the content isn’t as important as a good rhyming scheme and rhyming story.” The lyrics have at once become more superficial, but also more personal. Lydia\* spoke of this by saying that “you can be personal in such a beautiful way you won’t even notice” but directly using names and divulging information in song is not acceptable as respect for the other musicians must be upheld. To my understanding, current Calypsos do not follow one straight narrative like they used to, and instead jump from one theme to another as Matthew\* says “its just a bunch of pieces like a comedy show.”

From these conversations, it came to light that Calypso has developed from

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<sup>5</sup>Name was changed in 2013 to Caiso and Socca Monarch contest for the 59th Carnival Season.

its original form of story telling (almost) exclusively in the English language. Presently, Calypso is sung increasingly in Papiamentu and occasionally in Spanish and Dutch. During the early twentieth century native English speakers accounted for 50% of the Aruban population (Alofs 2008). This has dropped significantly to 8% (Alofs 2008), but nonetheless the language has a historical importance. Caribbean English has been on the island for almost a hundred years, which in Matthew's word "has some kind of significance for your country." It is during carnival season when the language is heard and used most with Sam suggesting that singing in English is a form of "respect to the elders and ancestors and those who help build Aruba. Run down now, this is the place that sparked Aruba's development there would be no Palm Beach or Oranjestad. And all the smoke we inhaled and the folks who worked in the refinery and got their hands dirty." The language preservationists promote the use of English in Calypso from a purely historical heritage perspective. The assimilationists advocate for multilingualism in Calypso. Calypso is an inherent part of Aruban identity, and thus allowing it to be sung in multiple languages present on the island could be a means to bridge the musical divide between uptown and downtown, as it would be inclusive to individuals of all linguistic backgrounds. However, linking back to Lydia's earlier comment, attracting tourists through big international stars would demand that the songs be sung in English, given its status as the dominant language in the global music scene.

Aside from the issue of language, what does the future hold for Calypso? Initially, I perceived tourism as a threat to Calypso. When I asked Edwin\*, he quickly replied by shaking his head "no no calypso is safe. I dont think we have a problem looking into the future with Calypso, we have talent enough" but did agree however that it should be placed on UNESCO's Intangible Culture list. Sitting in UNESCO office in Oranjestad speaking to Lydia\* seemed a fitting location to discuss the question of Calypso being recognised as Aruban intangible cultural heritage. The process involved is lengthy and heavily bureaucratic, a convincing case being required which validates Calypso's nomination and more importantly how the tradition will be kept alive in its most "raw" (Lydia personal communication, February 21, 2017) form. The kernel of this is that it must be that the heritage community itself which defines the phenomenon; it must not be the UNESCO office itself, which is simply a medium for the information to be passed on and officialise the demand. Currently, there is paucity in literature on the subject, few music recordings, and no archive logging of song lyrics. This makes it a difficult task to compile a case to be presented to UNESCO. From the perspective of the musicians, or cultural producers as some prefer to be called, Calypso "might even die out, when we go it goes too." Others believe it will continue on developing but

“music is dynamic and if you want it to remain you have to go with the time that's just the way it is.” Music is a living entity and will thus inevitably change over time. For the moment, the love people show for Calypso is guaranteeing its survival. As Lydia\* said, “It's really the locals who carry it.”

Placing Calypso on the intangible cultural heritage list isn't necessarily the answer, but it could be a step in the right direction according to Lydia\* because once officially defined it can be formally instructed through workshops in schools for instance. This would give Aruba's next generation an exposure to Calypso, and this might keep it alive. Aruban Calypso is uncontestedly unique, however as Matthew clearly stated “we have something very valuable some people don't even realize, we have to change our mind set because you can change many rules but you probably might kill it because people don't want to participate anymore.” The heritage community needs to organise itself and bring forth the effort and initiative for recognition, as this effort will not come from the Aruban Government. It is only fitting, as it is the cultural producers who are the living carriers of this heritage. The people are the organic roots of Calypso, the roots that will keep the Calypso art form nourished and alive.

## F Conclusion

To conclude this paper, the research question will be readdressed. How do local musicians perceive the impact of tourism on Calypso in Aruba?

Over three months of extensive research, conducting interviews with local musicians, meeting many stakeholders of the art form, attending numerous Calypso, Carnival and cultural events on the island it would appear by far the majority of local Aruban musicians and cultural producers do not perceive tourism to have had any direct impact on Calypso. The orbit of tourism and Calypso have not seeped into each other directly. Calypso music is not being played in the Hilton hotel lobby nor are there organised trips for the tourists to attend the annual Caiso and Socca contest. However, there is another side to this reality, whereby tourism has seemingly marked the geographical split within Calypso music on the island. Tourism is concentrated in Oranjestad, and Socca is only played during Carnival season for the largely tourist crowd. Although Carnival happens in San Nicolas too, Caiso is performed along with Socca at the events and contests. Caiso has been maintained (and perhaps even contained) uptown. Whilst Socca appeals to partygoers who which to revel in the infectious unique Caribbean sound, Caiso is more private and intimate music for the individuals whose culture, society and people are being sung about. This geographical separation may be a subconscious means to preserve Caiso in its most raw form, as the poor man's newspaper.

Nonetheless, the financial benefits to the economy of Aruba has obliquely affected Calypso. Under the guise of foreign investment in the form of chain hotels, time-shares, condominiums, restaurants and other luxury commodities sought after by tourists, tourism has brought about a subliminal change in the mind-set of the islanders towards commercialisation. This phenomenon has made its way into Aruban popular consciousness whereby everything, including the intangible cultural heritage such as Calypso, can be harnessed to reflect perceived Western normative wishes. Tourism is an intrinsic element of capitalism, neo-liberalism and globalisation which has swept

up Calypso, just like countless other cultural features around the world, and in which Aruba is a participating entity. As we have seen ironically it is only by being a tourist and coming and visiting Aruba can one appreciate and experience the uniqueness of the cultural phenomenon of Aruban Calypso since commercialisation of the music is virtually non-existent.

## G Discussion and Analysis

This section has two parts. The first part will discuss further the research process. The second part will be a discussion on my personal reflections on conducting ethnographic field research.

One can hypothesise about Calypsos development in the future, and measures to be taken now to prevent it from changing from its current form.. There will never be unanimous agreement; it will remain a struggle between retentionists, who desire to retain it in its original form, and the adaptionists, who advocate adapting to the changes brought about by time. The retentionists such as Sam\* and Edwin\* wish to preserve the tradition of singing Calypso in English, and through this the specific rhyming structure. Moreover, they view it as means to pay tribute to the British West Indian Caribbean individuals who brought it to Aruba nearly a century ago. The adaptionists such as Peter\*, and John\* follow the mantra “accept and adapt”. Peter\* believes his Calypso style will die with him, and thus acknowledges the importance of accepting the inevitable changes happening to Calypso. These changes include the lyric content, and its language. These conflicting stances make it difficult to define the art form. I attended talk in San Nicolas about the language debate on Calypso. From observing, it seemed that this is a strong point of contention amongst community members. The retentionists stated that English Calypso was a means to pay tribute to the music’s heritage; the language allowed a better rhyming pattern and the music could reach a larger international crowd. On the other hand, the adaptionists in favour of allowing Calypso to be sung in multiple languages argued that even the oldest Calypsos dating back to 1920 by Lord Cobashi were sung in Dutch thus refuting the fact that it had historically always been English. Moreover, they argued if Calypso is a mirror in which society is reflected then it should actually reflect the reality of the multilingual society on the island. No unanimous decision was made, and it was clear that individuals of the Aruban community - although understanding both sides of the argument - stick firmly to their stance on the matter. This is not exclusive to Calypso. Indeed anything that

is “culture” is embedded in a highly sensitive and contested sphere because culture is the genesis of human identity. It is therefore every individual’s prerogative to perceive culture differently and subsequently to debate it. Conducting ethnographic research on Calypso brought to light the complex nature of culture, and the importance of including all attitudes and nuances particularly where intangibles are concerned. A communal awareness will ensure an understanding, and potentially safeguard the cultural heritage, as it is through individuals that intangible heritage will live on. Allowing for the fact that everything, including culture, is a potential commodity, it could prove interesting to conduct further research on how tourist destinations (i.e. host societies) can access new forms of cultural exchange, other than through the sphere of commodification.

Conducting ethnographic field research on a culturally sensitive topic such as Calypso brought to light many of my own culturally bound notions and opinions. By engaging and participating with the research participants in conversations and cultural events, I became aware of what I embody and indeed represent to others. On numerous occasions, I found myself justifying (perhaps even to myself) my position as a researcher in Aruba. As a Caucasian European and female university student, I felt the need to validate my research and relate to the participants by demonstrating my knowledge and deep interest on the matter. This is characteristic of conducting anthropological research. Owing to the subject’s embarrassing history of colonialism, it seems to assume a position of superiority of the researcher. However, the researcher is just as exotic -to use Malinowski’s terminology - to the participants but the onus is on the researcher to reciprocate the openness of the participants. Ethnographic research has to be mutually enriching through the medium of ethno-dialogue as “knowledge is no longer a stolen secret, devoured in the Western temples of knowledge; it is the result of an endless quest where ethnographers and those they study meet on a path which some of us now call shared anthropology” (Rouch 1978: 104-18, as cited by Michrina, 2000).

Throughout the period of research on the island and by discussing the “why” behind many of the participants’ attitudes toward Calypso and Aruban society as a whole, I discerned my own cultural limitations. I began for instance to view things in a less binary way and accepted a more grey, nuanced approach. On a more methodological aspect, owing to not being able to contact and interview a female Calypsonian, this paper is entirely from a male perspective. However, ironically enough, this is a mirror image of the Calypso culture on an island, which has few female artists. On a final note, this research was not intended to reflect the entire island’s perception on the local Calypso music. The central aim was to create a tangible record of a particular moment in time of the voice of the cultural producers - the musicians who make Calypso

music and who are its custodians. This inevitably includes biases as anything involving human emotion naturally would. Yet their views and their vision is central to the question of how to preserve the intangible - the unique cultural heritage this island has given to the world - Aruban Calypso. How and in what form Aruban Calypso will change in the new environment (future) no one can predict because change is inevitable in all music forms. Whether it will be regarded as derivative, developed, diluted, debased or vibrant, outward looking and dynamic will prove interesting for future research.

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# I Appendix

1.A.

*“Calypso is a thing Im telling you  
When you are singing you must learn to be impromptu  
Never mind your English but mind your rhymes  
When you get the gist of it, you sing it all the time  
For veteran Calypsonians are known to be  
Men who can sing on anything instantly.”*

(Gorilla; 1938)

2.A

*“Since the Yankees came to Trinidad  
They have the young girls goin’; mad.  
The young girls say they treat ‘em nice  
And they give them a better price.  
They buy rum and Coca-Cola,  
Go down Point Cumana.  
Both mother and daughter  
Workin’ for the Yankee dollar.”*

(Lord Invader, 1942)

## 3.A



Wall separating “the colony” from “the village”, i.e. San Nicolas  
(Pictures by Ben Bultrini 2017)

## 4.A

*Long time ago things was slow,  
The island production was very low  
Used to kneel down and then pray  
That the good lord would send rain the next day  
For we used to plant in order to live  
And the little we got we could barely give  
Then Lago came in the place  
It was bread and butter for every race  
So let we God bless Lago, Oil Refinery  
(Lord Boxoe; 1984 for 60th anniversary of refinery)*

5.A

*No matter where carnival start*

*San Nicolas of Oranjestad*

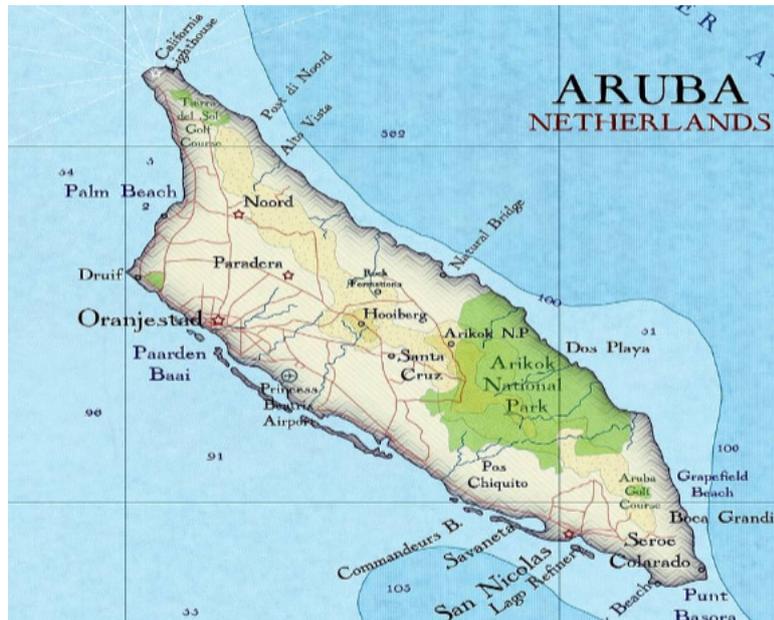
*The main purpose of people has was to celebrate culture and art*

*Tivoli did their thing and San Nicolas and also did their thing*

*So people say its Aruba carnival we celebrate*

(Mighty Reds; date unknown)

6.A



<http://ontheworldmap.com/aruba/>

7.A.

*As I am sure all you of you know*

*I have never been a singer of Calypso*

*I used to stand there in the back all on my own*

*And accompany my boys on the saxophone*

*But I received a letter from Amsterdam*

*me brother said he couldnt make his bram*

*And in his letter he presented a convincing case*

*And told me to put my sax on thing and take his place*

(Mighty Reds; date unknown)

8.A.

*Well this is the funniest of them all  
 I have studying this thing from since I am a small  
 Some people have names that dont even suit  
 Others have names that are damn well cute  
 But if you want to laugh till your belly a be painted  
 Take a close look at our arubian names  
 We have a I leave your Kok  
 Peto Kok  
 Aseen your Kok  
 Denise Kok  
 Vehein yourKok  
 Tititchi Kok  
 Geraldo Kok  
 And even My Kok*

(Mighty Reds; date unknown)

9.A

*Lucy, Lucy Queen ah Bacchanal  
 I grew up as ah real good girl  
 Always home, don't go nowhere  
 As soon as I was introduced to Carnival  
 Dey say I loose All down on di ground  
 Wukkin', wukkin' up mi bottom and it  
 Draggin', draggin' all ova town  
 Is the Bacchanal inside of meh...  
 Aw yeah When I come on ah stage,  
 get in ah band  
 You know I loose  
 When I drop it hot an I winnin'  
 On top di speaker box an I grindin';  
 I'm not da one to stop*

(Lucy by Destra Garcia; 2015)