

## BEAT THE DRUM & BREAK THE SILENCE

Constructing a Collective Ethnic Identity for Curaçao through the Tambú

MSc. Thesis Latin American & Caribbean Studies

University of Utrecht, the Netherlands

Date: July 8<sup>th</sup> 2009

Author: SSP Girigori

Supervisor: Dr. E. D. Rasch

Pages: 37

## CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Cultural Repression	
Introduction	6
Colonial influences upon identity	7
Internalization of oppression	10
Legal repression	13
Repression from the Catholic Church	16
Conclusion	18
The Tambú within the Curaçao society	
Introduction	18
Tambú as a way of life	19
The cultural changes expressed in the songs and dance of the Tambú	21
The Tambú as a cultural element	26
Conclusion	28
The Yu'i Kòrsou and the Tambú	
Introduction	29
A yu'i Kòrsou according to a yu'i Kòrsou	29
Development possibilities for the Tambú	30
Conclusion	31
Conclusion	32
Bibliography	35
Discography	37
Webpage	37

## Introduction

Every individual is the product of its history. For the Curaçaoan this is no exception. The Curaçaoans are inhabitants of a Caribbean island called Curaçao which pertains to the Dutch Kingdom. Like the other neighboring islands in the Caribbean, Curaçao has developed its society from its history of slavery and colonialism; a history significant for the multicultural structure upon the island. This multicultural structure is formed by groups of immigrants who established themselves on the island, in some cases, since the times of slavery, and build a community upon the island. A few examples are: a small group of indigenous inhabitants, the former slaves coming from Africa (which now form the dominant ethnic community on the island), followed by the Europeans (mostly from the Netherlands), South-Americans (particularly from Colombia and Venezuela), Portuguese (mostly from Madeira), Chinese, Surinamese and immigrants from other Caribbean islands (particularly from Haiti and Dominican Republic); all of these communities contributing to the formation of a collective identity for the island and thus influencing the formation of each individual ethnic identity (Marcha 2002; 76).

Identity refers to a person's self-definition as a separate and distinct individual, including behaviours, beliefs and attitudes (Gardiner & Kosmitzki 2008; 154). Identity responds to changes inside or outside an individual, shaping it according to its actual circumstances. This individual or personal identity can be expressed in many different ways depending on the person's own taste and interest. A person's self-definition can be dependant to, among others, its gender, social status within the society, the culture she/he lives in as well as its ethnicity. Ethnicity is a group of people who identify themselves with some same features that makes them different from another group. The features can be based upon culture, religion, language, physical similarities and certain behavioral patterns (1994; vii). As such, ethnicity also contributes to the formation of a person's identification; ethnic identity.

Ethnic identity varies from person to person, according to personal history implications of the self-concept and social behaviour (Gardiner & Kosmitzki 2008; 157). Such social behaviour can also be cultural related and whereupon it alternates the person's cultural perspective inducing conscious or unconsciously alterations within the way the whole society experience and expresses themselves culturally; the formation of a collective cultural identity. A cultural identity is an identity based upon cultural features, such as certain customs, dance, language, history and music (Hall 2003; 230). A collective cultural identity implies that an identity is being formed through cultural characteristics whereupon all the different ethnic groups on the island can be represented by in order to form a collective identity. The latter is not a natural construction; it can be only achieved if the culture in particular possesses some features whereupon the ethnic communities in the particular society can relay on.

This would mean that the collective ethnicity can not be sought in physical and/or racial features but rather on social and/or cultural elements. Cultural elements such as religion, certain customs linked to tradition, dance or music can attribute to the formation of a collective ethnic identity. In the case of Curaçao the language Papiamentu is a cultural element that is congruently used as the official form of communication among the inhabitants. Language is according to Hall the most obvious element that gives a group a collective point of recognition. And as such, language helps distinguish ways of communication between different groups; language makes it possible for a culture to be expressed within a group (Hall 2003; 33-36). Through Papiamentu all the ethnic communities on the island communicate collectively among and with each other. This language is on its turn the key element in the island's favorite form of expression; music. The purpose of this thesis is to investigate, by means of empirical investigation methods, the formation of the traditional music style called Tambú; a music style that has its roots settled among, particularly, the Afro-Curaçaoan community because this style of music has been passed over from the former slaves of Africa that landed on the island.

Music is more than a device of entertainment; it can be used as a point of recognition among people pertaining to a group and thus giving them a certain identity upon which the group can be recognized by. In many ways music reflect the social structures of a culture, shapes it and unite groups in order to create a collective identity for a community and/or a nation (Seegers 1994; 13). Music has the ability to reinvent itself if necessary in accordance with the social changes and developments of a culture and in doing so influences the character of a community/society

reflecting on the latter's ethnicity. This ethnicity reflected upon certain features of a community forms an ethnic identity; this ethnic identity being always adaptive to the situation it is in, meaning that it changes according to the social, political and power relations within the community in particular (Béhague 1994; vii). For music, as a form of cultural expression, this means that the music's concept of authenticity and traditionalism is also adaptive to what is considered authentic and traditional within a certain ethnic group at a particular time.

The culture the music represents may stay the same, yet, the idea of the culture the music represent is ever changing and will be therefore susceptible to influences from within the community as well as outside the community. The latter is very important for this thesis because the music style Tambú, which is the central point of investigation here, is considered to be a traditional music inherited from the African slaves and which has remained authentic as in its early beginnings through the decades. Considering Anthony Seegers' statement, where he implies that whoever we are today we can sing a song about it, it would mean for the Tambú that the changes the society underwent during the decades must have left their trails and/or marks in the Tambú-culture (Seegers 1994; 12). Linking Seegers' statement to Gerard Béhague's definition of ethnicity would also mean that the community that felt identified by the Tambú might have changed in matters of how they viewed themselves and what they thought the Tambú represented for them; the reason hereof assuming according to Béhague's perception upon ethnicity that through the decades the meaning of ethnicity changed. As such this might also implicate that the idea this particular community have had about themselves changed as well together with what the Tambú represented for them.

When music becomes a resource for group identification, the meaning of the music in particular, in this case the Tambú, can change while it does not necessarily mean an automatic alteration upon the way the music is made or the way the music is being expressed. The meaning of the music changes because the group that identifies themselves with the music in question links another representation to it (Hall 2003; 21). Assuming that through the decades, from the times of slavery up to the twenty-first century, many social changes has taken place that altered the cultural view and perception upon ethnicity of the islanders, this thesis wants to investigate what these changes meant and/or means for the Tambú while, through these changes, contributes in the construction of an ethnic identity for the inhabitants of Curaçao. By analyzing how the social changes through the decades as up to the twenty-first century has formed the perception of ethnicity upon the island these changes within and around the Tambú will be addressed.

Tambú is a musical form wherein African elements dominates; the rhythm is catchy and once the rhythm makes contact with a human body, there is no stopping the hips from moving harmoniously to the rhythm of the drum, the *barí*. Like many words in the language Papiamentu, Tambú has many definitions. First of all, for the Tambú-lovers and for many of the musicians, Tambú is a way of life that breaths tranquility and empowers at the same time. It is also the primordial instrument in the music, the drum or *tambú*<sup>1</sup>, also named *barí* and *tobo*. Besides the instrument, the music is also called Tambú and lastly there is the dance which is also referred to as Tambú. Tambú used to have also a religious practice based upon African musical rituals of adoration, but this element of the Tambú is the one that suffered the most under the repression, especially from the Catholic Church, that it practically vanished as such from the island.

Only two instruments are elementary in order to perform a Tambú, particularly in the performance of the traditional Tambú<sup>2</sup>. The drum called *tambú* or *barí* or *tobo* would be primordial together with a transformed hoe called *chapi* or *heru* together with one lead singer accompanied by two or three backup singers. Handclapping and stamping of the feet were also part of the performance and were done by the singer and the backup singers. This version of accompanying the instruments with the handclaps and the stamp of the feet on the ground was a particular characteristic found in the traditional composition of the Tambú. Throughout the years especially the stamping of the feet vanished from the Tambú and the handclapping remained only sporadically in some of the lyrics.

---

<sup>1</sup> When I will be referring to the instrument I will write the *tambú* as such, without capital letter.

<sup>2</sup> In the performance of the modern Tambú it is sometimes the case that other types of African percussion instruments are used, something that is never the case in the traditional Tambú.

The modern composition of the Tambú on the other hand uses two and sometimes even three sorts of drum. The first drum is always a *barí*, the second drum varies between a *barí* and a *barí grandi* (big drum that is traditionally used in the *Seú*) and if there is a third drum present it is mostly a conga or another type of African drum, like for example a *djembe*. In contrast to the traditional Tambú, the modern version has at least four *chapi*-players and at least five backup vocals.

I visited a Tambú event during my fieldwork that was dedicated to the catholic saint Anthony (one of the few Tambú events with religious connotation) called Lele Toni. The Tambú groups that performed at the beginning of the evening performed all in the traditional style of the Tambú; the atmosphere was very amicable, relaxed yet very amusing. Before the official ceremony started a Tambú group performed in the modern style. The change in atmosphere happened so fast and radically, very bizarre; the relaxed atmosphere transformed into an agitated one and everybody present felt a sort of a tension arise. When the group started to play a mass of people (these people were not present at the event earlier) pushed forward to the stage and around it obstructing the view of the people who were sitting as well as standing before the group started to play. The people that were already present at the event started one by one to leave because the music sounded extremely hard up to a point that I felt it to be more a noise than a Tambú rhythm.

The meaning of the tambú for the older generation, as for the performer of the modern Tambú, lies in the way they use the instrument. For the players of the tambú that perform in the traditional style the instrument is sacred because it is made only with products of nature where it was essential to keep the state of the moon and the sun into consideration. The leather used in the manufacturing of the *barí* is such an example; the leather used in the manufacturing is the sheep-skin and it has been linked to the biblical symbol of the sheep, the Lamb of God that takes away all sin. By relating a part of the instrument to the Holy Lamb which gives a religious meaning to the material, the instrument in its entirety obtains a certain value within the community that elevates the material's assets and thus receives a special place in the community (Miller 1998; 12-13). It represented the harmony between men and nature.

The other essential instrument of the Tambú, as mentioned above, is the *chapi*. The role of the *chapi* within the Tambú was that of a secondary background instrument. The *chapi* could have been left out or be replaced by handclapping in the Tambú according to José Zimmerman<sup>3</sup>, traditional *chapi*-player. In the modern Tambú however, the role of the *chapi* has increased going from secondary instrument to the same level of importance as the *barí*. Whereas in the traditional Tambú there was two to three *chapi* performing in the background, it has become between four and five *chapi* in the modern Tambú performance on the foreground. On the other hand the skill of dominating the sound of the *chapi* is lost in the modern composition. Zimmerman informs me that the skill that marked a *chapi*-player is not existent anymore. For Zimmerman this is an example of the loss of control over the *hoe* as an instrument but also a loss of craftsmanship within the Tambú. Though the role of the *chapi* within the Tambú increased the value it attributed to the Tambú decreased; people do not give meaning anymore to the material as they used to (Pellegram 1998; 110).

This thesis consists of three chapters with subtitles addressing the different aspects of the social changes that influenced and formed the Tambú. The first chapter will be addressing the cultural repression through the decades whereupon the Tambú developed around it. Firstly, the colonial influences upon identity-building will be analyzed to find out whether and to what extend these influences altered the way the Tambú was/is being expressed culturally. Internalization of oppression is a theme that can not be missed when discussing identities that developed from colonialism according to Ania Loomba (2008). Therefore, the possibility of such an internalization of oppression regarding cultural expression and a possible consequence for the Tambú will be analyzed. Further on the effects of legal repression upon the Tambú will be analyzed to find out if changes in the way of expression were forced legally upon the Tambú and if so, what it meant for the identity of the group and the music. Since during the times of slavery and, afterwards, colonialism the Catholic Church had such a fundamental role in the lives of, especially the poor, inhabitants and decided upon whether a cultural expression was seen as morally responsible or not, it is addressed to analyze how much of an impact these Catholic moralities had upon the

---

<sup>3</sup> Taped interview; Curaçao 7 July 2008

believes of and around the Tambú. Given that language is one of the most important elements wherein people can form a collective group with features different from other groups, the use of the language changes then also with the social changes underwent by the particular group (Gardiner & Kosmitzki 2008). Therefore the political suppression of language will be addressed in this chapter and throughout the different chapters of this thesis.

The following second chapter is to address the position of the Tambú within the Curaçao society. In the first subchapter the Tambú will be looked at from the point of being a way of life in order to address its true position as a cultural element within the Curaçao society. Further on the different cultural changes felt within the songs and dance of the Tambú will be analyzed to find out to what extent the position of the Tambú changed together with the cultural changes felt and experienced within the society. Then, before heading to the conclusion, the relation between the Tambú as a cultural element and the general cultural expression of the island will be addressed to find out which position the Tambú holds as a cultural element.

The last chapter is dedicated to analyze the current position of the Tambú within the Curaçao society and to find out what the view is of the Curaçao citizens when it comes to defining themselves as a culture and a country. Also the current possibilities for the Tambú to continue a positive cultural development will be addressed. This thesis will be furthermore finalized with a communal conclusion wherein the findings of this investigation will be summoned up in search for an answer to what the central question of this thesis was.

## **Cultural Repression**

### **Introduction**

Repression and oppression are themes that can not be overlooked when investigating identity in former colonial structures. The colonial structures remained, as Ania Loomba, author of *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (2008), points out, long after colonial rulers left the colonies and are still predominant in the hierarchical structure of these societies nowadays. The case on the island of Curaçao is no different in this matter. What was during the slavery and colonial era the key element in defining the colonizer from the colonized is as up today very visible in its social, economical and political structure.

Ethnicity and ethnic identity were during slavery and colonialism the point of recognition for the structure in class definition. The coloured people were during slavery the lowest rank of the society and everything that was negative were associated with this ethnic group; they formed the majority on the island and yet they had the least of privileges, freedom of movement and/or rights. The minority group, consisting of the European colonizers, maintained their authority upon the island, even after the abolition of slavery, by shrinking the social space of the majority as much as possible in order to assert themselves of lasting power (Do Rego 1995: 46).

The oppression of the coloured community was achieved legally by means of governmental legislations as well as from the Catholic Church which was the predominating power on the island until the late 50s of the twentieth century. Besides these two power enforcements it was also the case that a person with a lighter skincolour had a superior role upon someone of a darker skincolour (Do Rego 1995: 47). So basically, the lighter the skincolour the higher in rank in the society whereas the government had the superior executive power while the Church had, until the late 50s, the supreme power in not only religious matters, but also in social and cultural believes that structured the norms and values as well as the way these were expressed and experienced within the society in general.

In this part of the thesis I will discuss the colonial and postcolonial influences upon the Afro-Curaçao identity as well as the Curaçao identity in general. Afterwards I will be focusing upon the activities during the legal repression and what it meant for the Curaçao community, particularly the Afro-Curaçao community. Then I will address the repression upon the Afro-Curaçao community from the Catholic Church and its influence upon identity.

## Colonial influences upon identity

Colonialism left deep scarves in the Curaçao society, scarves that are still felt and lived today culturally as well as economically and within the social classification. According to Ania Loomba colonialism was more than the expansion of various European powers into Asia, Africa or the Americas and thus can not be defined as the conquest and control of other people's land and goods. Rather, according to Loomba, colonialism

“restructured the economies of the latter [the countries it conquered] drawing them into a complex relationship with their own, so that there was a flow of human and natural resources between colonized and colonial countries...In whichever direction human beings and materials traveled, the profits always flowed back into the so-called ‘mother country’”.(Loomba 2008; 9)

The idea that colonialism restructured the conquered countries to benefit economically through all circumstances is perfectly plausible. This is also the case for the island of Curaçao as well as for the other Dutch Caribbean islands. Though it has been more than fifty years after the colonial era, the island still functions upon an infrastructure which depends upon the ‘mother country’ or that is to say the Netherlands. The island's dependency upon the ‘mother country’ is particularly an economical dependency which would make the island, according to Ania Loomba, a neo-colonial country (island); the island remained economically and/or culturally dependent (2008; 12). This puts the island in a very difficult position to classify because as Loomba suggests, an island in such position can in fact not be qualified as postcolonial due to its economic and/or cultural dependency to the ‘mother country’.

As such, for Curaçao, an island that is politically independent from the ‘mother country’ yet economically dependent in such a degree that its dependency influences the island's cultural, social and even political structure, puts the island in a more decolonial phase rather than a postcolonial phase. Decolonial phase because of the island's inability or rather not-yet-achieved financial independence from the ‘mother country’, thus keeping the island in a semi-independency and nevertheless on their way to a postcolonial phase but still not there yet; as Gert Oostindie refers to this issue, a decolonization in a nutshell (2003).

On the other side, for Homi Bhabha, “postcolonial perspectives emerge from the colonial or anticolonialist testimonies of third world countries and from the testimony of minorities within the geopolitical division of East/West, North/South” (1992; 46). Though Curaçao is statistically not counted as a third world country its position is still that of a minority, in this case, within the Dutch Kingdom. As such, besides the economical and political consequences (which will not be broadly discussed in this thesis) the ideal concept of cultural articulation is being reinterpreted and rewritten from the very own creator of the “old” colonial consciousness responsible of the cultural displacement that took place during slavery (Bhabha 1992; 48). This implies for Curaçao as a minority, for its cultural construction of values and priorities, the tendency to look up to the cultural ideal standards from the very own ‘mother country’ which structures the island colonially. Thus applying cultural values not pertaining to the minority group (in this case the predominant Afro community) in order to obtain cultural and social requirements more effective in pursue of power and knowledge.

So basically, though the end of colonialism the island's dominant ruling group is mimicking the former colonial structure that was mimicked from the ‘mother country’ and “alienates its own language of liberty and produces another knowledge of its norms” (Bhabha 1984; 126). What Bhabha implies here is that there can be no representation in mimicry because mimicry repeats; meaning that there can not be a cultural representation from mimicry. But in the case of Curaçao and its partial mimicry from the ‘mother country’, a cultural representation within this mimicry is absolutely the case.

While mimicry can not represent according to Bhabha, Stuart Hall sees mimicry as a binary form of representation through sharply opposed, polarized binary extremes; requiring from the individual in particular to be both things at the same time (Hall 2003; 229). For the Afro-Curaçao community the binary extremes meant to be black and white at the same time in the ways of expression. But even in this binary form of representation the dominant culture was the white or the European culture above the black or the African culture. Furthermore, though the Afro-

Curaçao community formed the majority on the island, it was the minority European group which arranged their position of power through colonial structure that established the standard of cultural values and norms of expression within the island's society. Usually such a situation in a particular country demands from the minority ethnic group to adjust to the majority ethnic group, yet in the case of Curaçao we see the opposite; these are the consequences which remained from the colonial structure. What the dominant group saw as inappropriate or qualified as savage or uncivilized were not only suppressed from the outside but also from inside the community itself, leading in different occasions to acts of betrayal of the own community in order to receive recognition from the dominant group.

The Tambú in this case did not fit to the European standards but rather, was seen more as a form of savagery and religiously as immoral and demonic. Moreover, anyone who associated themselves on one way or another with the Tambú was seen as the most uncivilized and savage of persons. Therefore the whole structure and meaning of the Tambú changed due to the self-repression employed within the Afro-Curaçao community. Together with the meaning of the Tambú, the cultural representation of the Tambú changed as well and thus the way people identified with it changed, in this case, from a positive identification to a negative one. The reason for this identity-change can be found in Stuart Hall's perspective upon meaning. According to him

"meaning is what gives us a sense of our own identity of who we are and with whom we 'belong' –so it is tied up with questions of how culture is used to mark out and maintain identity within and difference between groups" (Hall 2003; 3).

So, if the meaning of a certain cultural expression transform into and/or acquire a negative meaning, the concept of identity will follow by changing and/or adjusting to the new situation as well. For example, if taken into consideration the times of slavery, before colonialism; it marked the image or the way society viewed the Afro-Curaçao community. Though it were the Africans who were the victims during the history of slavery, it was the colonizer who determined the definition of what or who was good or wrong, thus everything that was associated with the Africans in general became the synonym of negativity and being wrong (Loomba 2008; 108). The meaning of an African became something negative whereas back in Africa, before the Africans were captured and enslaved, this negative connotation to Africans might not have existed. Yet after the introduction and the abolition of slavery the very own Afro-Curaçao community on the island adopted the meaning of being bad and/or negative, a comparison often made with the dominant European minority group on the island.

This binary representation whereby the European polarity dominates the African polarity makes it difficult to conceal a presence or identity behind the mask of mimicry according to Homi Bhabha (1984; 129). Within such a double vision with a dominant polarity the conceptualization of a collective or individual identity becomes dependable on how outer perspectives influence the subject of meaning. Therefore the object becomes dependent of the meaning other groups ascribed to it to construct its own collective or individual identity. Therefore, as Frantz Fanon puts it, the black man stops being an actional person for only the white man can represent his self-esteem (Quoted by Bhabha 1984; 129).

In first instance this seems impossible to achieve but when analyzed closer it becomes clear that what happens is that the collective or individual identity is rooted in a concept of fear; fear of not being white enough, fear of not being black enough, fear of not having enough within the black as well as the white community. For many of my informants it is this aspect of fear that has and still is questioning the collective Curaçao identity; people are afraid of the others who look different but even more from the ones who looks the same as them. Jeanne Henriquez, investigator and coordinator of Museo Tula told me that

*"Fear plays a mayor role: since the times of slavery it was customary that there was very few for us and a lot for them, so therefore it became a survival within the community which left no space to unite and work together to establish a stable community". (Jeanne Henriquez; Curaçao, 14 July 2008)*

In Jeanne's perspective, the fear of not having enough has made it very difficult for the Afro-Curaçao to embrace the own culture. People did not want to run the risk of remaining



marginalized so the concept of culture was sacrificed in order to gain a better life but not necessarily a more fulfilling one. Instead of the own cultural identity people started assimilating another cultural identity which brought them in practice even farther away from their identity as an individual. Therefore people still does not know who they are, where they came from and let alone to know where they are going. The Afro-Curaçao community lacks a sense of belonging because it has not been passed over from generation to generation. What has been passed over from generation to generation, though, is the lack of trust in the own abilities and the community's ability to construct their own culture without being dependent of the meanings that comes from outside the community. The consequences are that there is a cultural identity that still is not able to set peace with its history in order to move forward, meaning it is still searching for its own identity and that makes its culture very vulnerable for outer influences.

Rene Rosalia<sup>4</sup>, director of the *Kas di Kultura*, says that the images the Afro-Curaçao community constructed of themselves was based upon the image of identity the colonizer had upon them; the black community did not learn to see themselves as they were but rather as the oppressor wanted them to be. This explains why people are willing to give up their culture for something that is not theirs; it is because this structure has been passed on from generation to generation. According to Rene this is the reason why fear and shame is so vastly anchored into the black community. People are ashamed and scared of external judgment they might obtain for expressing themselves in their culture. People hesitate when it comes to taking cultural decisions and leave it to the 'other' because no one wants to be finger pointed at while the culture remains weak and with every outer influence that penetrates into the island the culture staggers. And the whole issue of whom we are, where we came from and where we are going, start all over again. This is the consequence and danger of mimicry according to Homi Bhabha; "the ambivalence ...repeatedly turns from *mimicry* – a difference that is almost nothing but not quite – to *menace* – a difference that is almost total but not quite" (Bhabha 1984; 132). So instead of a closure towards the self originates that which takes the individual and/or community further away from an individual or collective identity.

As a consequence hereof there is a huge lack of patriotism on the island; patriotism in the own identity and lack of knowledge of the own culture. The local authorities do not establish themselves as a role model in this search but are rather keen to lean towards the illusory idea of a cultural identity that was established by the colonizer. The local authorities does not urge or finance the schools to educate the pupils in their own history and language, instead the authorities stimulates the education of foreign history and language above the island's own. Gilbert Bacilio thinks that the community became too serene and

*"Now that Kas di Kultura exists, people who want to organize cultural activities just go there to apply for permission and subsidy...the constant struggle of the 80's does not exist anymore and it is not necessary either, the way has been opened. But I am afraid the struggle of the 80's might now get lost, issues of autonomy we fought for are still on hold, issues of being a nation with its own language has been pushed away. People are getting tired of waiting and tend to give up and re-colonized themselves mentally... So therein you could say that we did not finish the trajectory of identity properly in the 80's, we are back where we started..."* (Gilbert Bacilio; Curaçao, 4 June 2008)

Bacilio does make a point there because by hearing a record of Tambú or another traditional music of the late 70's and 80's that sang about the issues of identity, autonomy and equality, it is precisely the same thing that is going on nowadays in 2008. The vicious circle of mimicry is shown here again; the ambivalence of being almost the same but not quite whereupon stabilized construction of identity becomes a difficult task to achieve (Bhabha 1984; 132-133).

The Afro-Curaçao community still does not know where it belongs on its own territory and therefore embraces everything that according to the social accepted standards might give her/him an own identity. For Ania Loomba, colonization is "thingification" and stands for the reduction of the colonized person into an object (Loomba 2008: 114). For Homi Bhabha on the other hand, colonization can not only be considered as the thingification of the colonized person with behind it the essence of the African presence. Its danger lies in the ambivalence of mimicry and menace

---

<sup>4</sup> Taped interview; Curaçao 17 July 2008

which disable the colonized person to acquire an identity by her/him and for her/him (Bhabha 1984; 129). For me, both the thingification of the colonized person and the mimicry of being almost the same as the colonizer but not quite has attributed to the lack of trust in capability of the own community. And as such, instead of a stabilized collective and/or individual identity it resulted into the internalization of fear and dependency upon the 'mother country'.

### Internalization of Oppression

The most existent scar within the society of nowadays that goes back all the way to slavery is the oppression imposed upon oneself within its community: the internalization of oppression. The internal oppression is the result of many centuries of imposed suppression upon the black community. People grew up in fear of doing anything wrong that might have displeased the masters and therefore they imposed even stricter rules upon themselves in order to make sure they did not arise the anger of their masters. Mental slavery replaced the physical slavery that was abolished and remains existent in the need to be different in order to be accepted. People started believing that they were indeed of inferior race, lacked capacities of auto-sufficiency and that their culture and history were mediocre and something to be ashamed of. Consequently the culture has remained too weak to establish itself stable and properly against the changes of a globalized world. And as such every outer influence, whether it is on political, social or cultural arena, shakes the cultural foundation and feeds the doubts of the individual's identity (Loomba 2008; 176-179).

Rene Rosalia<sup>5</sup> sees the internalization of oppression as the most unfortunate thing that could have happened to the island's Afro-Curaçao culture. If a culture gets struck from the outside while being solid on the inside it can easily regroup itself without leaving much scars in the cultural identity. But in the case of Curaçao, after the outer influences that damaged the cultural identity seized to manifest, the destruction of the culture started from its core centre. The people began to impose self-repression upon their culture and themselves in order to participate in the society. It became 'normal' to imitate cultural concepts of other ethnic groups on the island. This 'normalization' as Homi Bhabha (1999) calls it, has been responsible for the alienation of the collective and individual identity of the Afro-Curaçao community and thus, from that perspective, every outer cultural identity became better than the community's own cultural identification. In the pursue of the Afro-Curaçao community to minimize the differences between the black and white, racial distinctions became important within the community in their attempts to imitate (mimicry) the physical looks of the dominating (European) binary opposition (Hall 2003; 244).

Differences in skin colour, hair and appearances in general became predominant whereas the comparisons were waged against people with European features that had nothing physically in common with people of African descendant. For example, people with European characteristics, especially the hair, were referred to as having *bon kabei* (good hair) in comparison to *kabei duru* (hard hair) of the Afro-Curaçao community. So the child grew up constantly hearing around her/him that the European-looking person has good hair and that she/he does not. The beauty standard that is created is that in the need to have that same kind of hair to be beautiful; as a result meaning the co-creation of a new identity whereupon the social standard of perfection is being idealized. Ania Loomba says about the internalization of colonialism that

"The colonized could not cope with what was happening because colonialism eroded his very being, his very subjectivity...The black person attempts to cope by adopting white masks that will somehow make the fact of his blackness vanish." (Loomba 2008: 122-124)

According to Loomba the source of the internalization lies in the total disregard of acceptance of the culture of the colonized by the colonizer whom was more concerned in the establishment of new civilizations based upon European standards and disregarded anything that did not look European, in this case, the cultural being of the colonized. Cultural customs that were passed over from generation to generation were in danger of being destroyed in very short amounts of time. That is also what happened to the Afro-Curaçao culture. But because, according to Homi

---

<sup>5</sup> Taped interview; Curaçao, 17 July 2008

Bhabha, colonial identities are always oscillating and therefore never perfectly achieved, the Afro-Curaçao identity could survive partially even after so much internal destruction; not everything got lost. I do agree with Bhabha when he argues that

“the divide between black skin and white mask is not a ‘near division’ but a doubling dissembling image of being in at least two places at once...It is in relation to this impossible object that there emerges the liminal problem of colonial identity and its vicissitudes.” (Quoted by Loomba 2008: 125)

The Curaçao identity is constantly ‘juggling’ between these doubling dissembling images. It can not be black enough from fear of being ridiculed and reduced to primitivism and savagery but it can not be white either because it does not possess the racial features of a European physical identification. So it tries to embody features of both these binary oppositions with a dominating white binary, in the search for the own identity. Such a search for the own identity also influences the Tambú as a cultural form of expression.

Besides the internal influences on the island that challenge the existence of the Tambú, there are also international influences that do not necessarily need to be all negative in the development of the Tambú and the Curaçao culture in general. One positive example coming from outside the island towards the Tambú is the positive perspective the music receives in the international musical world. The Tambú is still not known as other musical genres but where it is performed, it is received with applause. Four of my informants<sup>6</sup> are accustomed to perform with the Tambú internationally and all told me how enthusiastic the audience reacts when they play a Tambú, even though the audience does not understand (most of the times) what is being sung.

I had a similar experience once in Alkmaar, the Netherlands, where I was enjoying a performance of a group wherein Roël Calister and Rendel Rosalia played the barí and the chapi. Almost nobody present was familiar with the type of music they were playing. When they started to play a Tambú a lady sitting in front of me asked me whether this music was from Brazil. I then explained to her that the music was called Tambú and that it was from Curaçao plus some additional cultural information. I remember laughing to a remark the woman gave me before she left; she said we (Curaçaoans) should feel very proud of this musical heritage whereas on the island, instead of being seen as such, the Tambú is still in the phase of negative stigmatization. While on the island the own government does not contribute to its prevailing in the Curaçao culture, outside the island, people (most of them intellectuals) experience the Tambú as something very positive. It might be possible that because the history of the Tambú is not attached to the music when it is performed abroad that its significance changes. All the historical and social weight remains on the island in the perception and cultural experience of the Curaçao society. Abroad the Tambú simply signifies a foreign musical genre from the island of Curaçao; there is no other connotation attached to it (Finden-Crofts 1998; 149). Yet, the challenge for the island remains in adopting a more positive approach for the Tambú without constantly attaching it to negativity.

On the island itself the interest for the own culture in general is still low and this lack of interest is visible in the musical presentation heard on the media on the island. Jeanne Henriquez<sup>7</sup> says that in order to restore the lack of interest in the own culture, it is important to attract the younger generation into cultural activities in order to establish a more solid base for the culture because it is precisely the youth who would be the first to toss out cultural inheritance because they are presumed to be ‘old-fashioned’ and are then replaced with products of the international market. It is very important, according to Henriquez, to involve the youth in the conceptualization of new cultural standards of identity because it will be them who will carry the new identity to the future generations. The conceptualization of a new cultural standard has to serve as a means of pride for the Curaçao identity despite the history of repression instead of remaining victimized by own culture and history. The positive critiques the Tambú receives abroad can also contribute to the conceptualization of a new cultural standard; it can serve as an example as to how interesting and beautiful the intellects abroad see the music, so that the Curaçao society can learn to see and benefit the positive characters of the Tambú.

---

<sup>6</sup> The four informants are: Rendel Rosalia, Roël Calister, Alvin Inesia and Javier Cordoba.

<sup>7</sup> Taped interview; Curaçao, 14 July 2008

Henriquez<sup>8</sup> believes that in order to establish a more solid culture on the island financial matters has to be addressed as well. As long as ninety percent of the financial circuit on the island remains in hands of foreigners, the money available for cultural affairs will remain scarce. Therefore the cultural developments concerning the Afro-Curaçao community will remain dependant upon the good will of people who does not feel represented by the Afro-Curaçao culture. Henriquez thinks that the Afro-Curaçao community needs to learn to work for themselves; they need to understand that therein lie their future independence. As long as the mental shift does not partake the cultural development will remain financially dependent upon foreign investors because the government does not give sufficient financial support. Therefore, the cultural development will remain restrained into its forms of expressions and thus confining the developments in the construction of a cultural identity (Finden-Crofts 1998; 153).

The search for the own identity between the two oppositions, black and white, has also affected the cultural development of the Tambú parties and the way the society looks upon these parties. The Tambú parties have suffered from negative stigmatization within the afro community as well as the society in general. Even nowadays the parties are being very carefully considered before actually attended, not only by the Afro-Curaçao community but the society in general. Especially the *Tambú di snèk*<sup>9</sup>: in an attempt to popularize the Tambú gatherings the government of the 80's, last century, gave permission to the snèk-owners to throw Tambú gatherings at the snèk, especially in the Christmas and New Year season. Instead of helping the Tambú gain a positive perspective in the society it helped stigmatize the Tambú as being negative and vulgar (Rosalia 1997; 226-227). People who attend these parties are seen as vulgar, indecent and violent within their own community and the Curaçao society in general. The Tambú groups who perform at these parties are the modern groups and thus the parties get stigmatized from the old generation of the Tambú as well.

According to Donny Marcelina<sup>10</sup>, putting the Tambú at the snèk meant reconfirming the idea that it was something mediocre and inferior that on its turn only strengthened the self-restriction applied in matters of the Tambú. Being seen at a Tambú di snèk, especially for a woman, was the ultimate act of indecency, an identity that did not remained at that place for that moment, but rather was carried by the very same community into the Curaçao society, attributing very negative gossip towards the female in particular and sometimes even her family.

The reason why the popularization of the Tambú backfired when it was put at the snèk is because the snèk had already a dubious reputation within the society. Everything that had to do with the evening activities of the snèk was already interpreted as mundane and negative by the society. So automatically when the Tambú was joined into the evening activities of the snèk it also felt into the line of interpretation the society had about the snèk and because the Tambú was already experiencing negative propaganda it was easy to identify the Tambú with the snèk's interpretation (Gledhill 2003; 359-360).

For the last ten years there has been a positive development though regarding the mentality towards the Tambú gatherings coming from a group of Afro-Curaçao intellectuals who, empowered by Kas di Kultura, are bringing a sense of prestige to one kind of Tambú party that was practiced in the older days. The *Tambú konbidá* (invited Tambú party) has become since the last six to seven years a hot item within the society. This type of Tambú party can only be attended if received an invitation otherwise entrance to the party would be negated. The society interprets such invitation as belonging to the intellectual group that does not feel negligence towards the Afro cultural expression and the society, the Afro-Curaçao community in particular, tend to look up at these peoples and put them in the position of a role model for the community (Hall 2003; 259). So contrary to the negative stigma someone might receive for attending the Tambú di snèk, a person invited to the Tambú konbidá will be referred to as being an intellectual and as such people might look up at these persons in particular.

---

<sup>8</sup> Taped interview; Curaçao, 17 July 2008

<sup>9</sup> Tambú di snèk are performances at some local bars on the island. These 'bars' are very small and made in such a way that the customers stand or sit outside the establishment in the open air. When the person wants to buy something to eat or drink it can be done through some small open windows build in the establishment but always standing on the outside. When bands or like this case, Tambú groups perform at a snèk they stand always outside the establishment, either beside it or in front of it.

<sup>10</sup> Taped interview; Curaçao, 25 May 2008

My informants believe that the struggle for personal identity and mental freedom has not taken place throughout the years. The culture of fear and shame continues as up today to hold the individual mentally back; the mentality of the people has to change otherwise the community would be moving forward externally while taking all the old baggage of inferiority of not being good enough with them internally. For my informants, as long as the community remains mentally enslaved, the chance to build a new cultural existence where the predominant culture receives its place in society without being mediocre is not realizable because the mind is free enough to accept new cultural perspectives. Positive initiatives that comes from the community itself such as Tambú konbidá contributes positively to the cultural awareness of the community and may help brake the pattern of mental slavery.

### **Legal repression**

In the former paragraphs I addressed the hierarchical structure whereupon the collective and individual identity of the Afro-Curaçaoans developed in the Curaçao society, which resulted into a massive alienation from Afro-Curaçaoan cultural expressions such as the Tambú. Besides the alienation from the Afro-Curaçaoan community from its own cultural expression, there was also another factor that played an important role in the suppression of cultural expressions like the Tambú; namely through legal repression. One thing that came up during all the interviews I had during my investigation was the negative role of the government, as up today, towards the cultural developments involving the predominant mass, meaning the Afro-Curaçaoan community. I found out that people are getting really tired of the way the government deals with internal affairs.

This critique rises from every corner of society, especially now with the negotiations with the Netherlands concerning Curaçao's autonomy within the Dutch Kingdom. People are feeling as though the government is selling out on the island's culture and that the government does not care for the consequences this selling out of cultural heritage will have on a long term. Many of my informants referred to the actual political situation as to going back into colonial times, a re-colonization Bacilio called it and it is a statement Rene Rosalia, Jeanne Henriquez, Alvin Inesia, Rendel Rosalia and José Zimmerman shares with Bacilio.

I believe that by now it is obvious that during slavery and the colonial era many atrocities happened with the slaves and later Afro communities by hand of the colonizers on ground of connecting superiority to skincolour. So I will not be focusing on these matters but rather I will pay attention to some law decrees applied upon the Afro-Curaçaoan community at the beginning of the twentieth century that left a deep mark upon law implementations after colonialism regarding matters of cultural expression; mainly the law implementations regarding the Tambú.

In 1936 under supervision of the island's governor Van Slobbe, a Dutch veteran, the Colonial Council passed a decree forbidding Tambú on governmental grounds implying prohibition of the dance, the singing, the playing and the possession of a *bari* on the grounds the government rented to the poor community, meaning the coloured community (quoted by Rosalia 1997: appendix). Before this official prohibition there was already a form of very strict control applied when it came to cultural entertainment of the mass, the Afro-Curaçaoan community that is, especially concerning the Tambú. What I found interesting in this decree is that it was to be implemented only on the rental grounds of the government in order to maintain order and a sense of 'decency' in the community whereas upon private properties the police needed the permission of the landowner to trespass his property (Rosalia 1997: 130-138). It was known that the landowner of the plantation of Savaneta allowed the Afro-Curaçaoans to perform the Tambú on his property only between the months of January and March. In exchange for his "generosity" the people who came to the Tambú were obliged to help the landowner harvest his crops (Rosalia 1997; 146).

So basically the landowner was not that generous towards the people who attended the Tambú on his property but rather took advantage of the situation to acquire free labor on his plantation in the harvest season. But this also shows the sovereignty this group of landowners enjoyed on the island during colonialism; they practically stood above the law. I also find it thus plausible to deduce that the identity-formation of this particular group developed through an already predominant position of power; even though they do not stand above the law anymore, they do

not stand under it neither which asserts their dominant influence in the society as of today through their descendants (Bhabha 1985; 78-79).

What this decree did was to forbid the coloured community their cultural expression without mentioning it as such. All people who rented a piece of ground by the government were namely from the Afro-Curaçao community, all other ethnic groups that were present on the island at the time were able and allowed to buy a piece of land and thus were private properties. The people who lived on the private properties were mainly the elite, former landowners during slavery and later Jewish merchants, who saw the Tambú as a personal threat as well as an act of barbarism, denigration and immorality and thus were pro the prohibiting of the Tambú.

To make sure the law was obeyed military policemen from the Netherlands were brought over to the island, if caught and found guilty of dealing with the Tambú on governmental grounds, the person would lose her/his rented ground and sometimes even be incarcerated. The law gave the policemen total freedom in acting and applying the law against the Tambú and anyone who were involved with it, mainly the Afro-Curaçao community (Rosalia 1997; 107). Therefore, if a policeman thought it necessary to break the instruments for example, he could do so without having to explain his action; the law supported his actions completely<sup>11</sup>. This official prohibition lasted until 1954 and damaged not only the culture around the Tambú but also the entire cultural way of life of the Afro-Curaçaoans.

Even after the prohibition was lifted the sanctions against the Tambú remained but were now executed by local policemen instead of the military police. The lower rank of the police force consisted in the 50's particularly of people from the Afro-Curaçao community; the people of other ethnic groups on the island who joined the police force were placed in ranks above the Afro-Curaçao policemen (Rosalia 1997; 154). Morty Geertruida remembers this well, he told me

*"After the prohibition of the Tambú was lifted we were still persecuted by the police but the things changed a lot because you had black policemen then and they understood the spirit of the Tambú. So they did not act harsh upon the people, most of the time you could give them drinks and food and they would leave us alone. But not all of them; you had those black policemen who thought that they were better than us...when one of them would come rage a Tambú we would throw the bari in the mondi (type of small forest) otherwise they would confiscate it like the white policemen did."* (Morty Geertruida; Curaçao 1 July 2008)

What Morty means with the things changed is that now the legal repression used people from the Afro-Curaçao community as well to suppress its own culture. I also deduced from what Morty told me that back in those days it was considered a social progress for a black man to become a police officer and thus some of them tended to implement as much as possible the European customs in order to assert their job which implied that some of them acted more white than the white policeman himself. Again the menace of mimicry, as Homi Bhabha (1984) refers to it, is shown here. For Ania Loomba what happens is that the black person attempts to cope by adopting white masks that will somehow make the fact of his blackness vanish (2008: 124). Those are the ones Morty meant when he said *"those who thought that they were better than us"*.

It is also important to point out that because of the use of black policemen to suppress the Tambú, it was possible on the other hand to decrease the harsh enforcement of the law against the Tambú which gave the community a bit of a brake after all, though it also must be said that at this particular point in history there was already a strong form of self-repression coming from the community itself; thus developed to become the internalized fear discussed earlier in this thesis.

Returning to the point made earlier about the black policeman acting whiter than the white policeman I have to add that this behaviour was not only negative for the Tambú but it also helped stipulate a certain image within the community that possibly attracted younger people more than the older generation regarding the proper way to behave in order to grow out of poverty and into a better lifestyle. It might have helped establish the idea that in order to overgrow poverty it was necessary to adopt a new and alien identity while suppressing the own way of life

---

<sup>11</sup> Law Police Mandate A 1891 nr. 12, with the authorization of the Colonial Parliament, article 97, stipulate that: the authority figure that gave the permission stipulated the required conditions upon the permission that was given (Quoted by Rosalia 1997; 116). There was no indication within this article or mandate that stipulated the terms of the conditions and it gave no possibility to appeal the conditions given and/or contest the decision made by the authority figure; the police was able and could do whatever they pleased.

and thinking and therefore creating a sort of a double identity. I think Homi Bhabha would agree upon my statement. He believes that the divide between black skin and white mask is not a near division but a doubling, dissembling image of being in at least two places at once (Quoted by Loomba 2008: 125). Frantz Fanon calls this phenomenon 'denegrification': the idea and/or possibility for the Negro to whiten her/himself and thus increasing the chance to go from object among objects to pursue the white perception (Fanon 1986; 418). Stuart Hall appoints this issue as the inevitable assimilation of the black men to gain entry in the mainstream by adapting to the white image of norms, style, looks and behaviour in order to obtain a better life (Hall 2003; 270). This issue left a very visible line through the Curaçao history, also in matters regarding the Tambú.

Through the Curaçao history the government adopted, even after colonialism, a consequent approach against the Tambú. After the formation of the Netherlands Antilles in 1954, based upon democracy, it was not possible to prohibit the Tambú by law because it would have been contradictory to the human rights decreed by the United Nation wherein it stipulates that every person has the right to live and express themselves in their culture without being suppressed by their government for doing so<sup>12</sup>. The ways the government uses nowadays to suppress the Tambú is more subtle than some fifty years ago but it is not less dangerous towards the cultural development.

Alvin Isenia<sup>13</sup>, a musician better known on the island as Tio Ali, told me that nowadays it looks like the Tambú is not being repressed anymore but that is nevertheless not the case; it is still bonded by the law in means of place, time and licenses. Tio Ali also points out that whereas music festivals of foreign cultures are permitted to perform until three o'clock in the night, Curaçao cultural events, mainly Afro-cultural events, are not permitted to last after eleven o'clock in the evening. I did experience what Tio Ali said during my fieldwork on the island; Curaçao cultural events were obliged to end at eleven o'clock in the evening whereas Dutch and Dominican events were permitted to last until three o'clock in the midnight. The excuses the authorities usually give are related to safety precautions and to prevent calamities, yet when asked, these authorities can not specify as to what kind of calamities. Licenses for Tambú parties are also very hard to get because the government makes an issue out of every little thing to discourage the people to apply for a permit.

Donny Mercelina<sup>14</sup> (barí-player), told me that most of the people who were known to throw Tambú parties stopped doing that because it is getting more difficult to get a permit; the government makes a fuss out of everything that it is not worth so much effort anymore<sup>15</sup>. And thus the amount of Tambú parties decreases whereas the chance for the Tambú to loose its place in the Curaçao culture increases. The lesser the parties become the fewer contact the community will have with this form of cultural expression and as such the Tambú could be risking yet again the chance to vanish out of the cultural expression arena on the island. Though this might look like an overstatement it is not to be overlooked at, especially considering that such an approach during the late 50s and 60s of the twentieth century led to the vanishing of another Afro-cultural expression called *Seú* (a harvest feast) that regained a place in the Curaçao culture again only some ten years ago but in such a commercialized manner that the basis of the authentic *Seú* is hardly there anymore (Rosalía 1997; 229-230).

Besides the slightly modern way the government is trying to repress the Tambú directly, it is also menacing other cultural traditions that might have an indirect reaction upon the Tambú. The government still refuses to subsidize schools who wants to incorporate Afro-Curaçao history and culture in their curriculum while this year (2008) they literally took the Papiamentu, the native language of a vast 95 percent of the islanders, out of the schools again because the Dutch government thought it would be a better idea to implement the Dutch language again into the

---

<sup>12</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations; Article 27.

<sup>13</sup> Taped interview; Curaçao, 25 May 2008

<sup>14</sup> Taped interview; Curaçao, 17 July 2008

<sup>15</sup> According to the law the Tambú is a cultural expression and therefore can not be forbidden. But what the authorities can do is to torment the applicant with every single detail in the hope that the applicant would get tired of the situation and quit the application to throw a Tambú party.

educational system; a language that is spoken by a minority of five percent on the island. For Stuart Hall

“To belong to a culture is to belong to roughly the same conceptual and linguistic universe, to know how concepts and ideas translate into different languages, and how language can be interpreted to refer to or reference the world. To share these things is to see the world from within the same conceptual map and to make sense of it through the same language systems.” (Hall 2003: 22)

Language is a very important element to conceptualize a culture according to Hall and therefore I dare assume that to marginalize the culture’s language, as is becoming the case on Curaçao, means that the culture will lose important essences that makes it possible for individuals to identify with the culture and with each other within the same culture. The language is one of the most important elements within the Tambú. It is what brings over the meaning of the Tambú to the people and their culture and as such represents a culture (Gardiner & Kosmitzki 2008; 110). If this essence gets lost the Tambú’s own existence as a representative of a culture might change in manners so drastic that the concept of the Tambú might come to an end.

Through the above argument the position of the government is shown as not very keen on the idea of having the Tambú as one of the cultural expressions upon the island. But to give a last example of my point I would like to refer to a very interesting experience I had during my fieldwork that proves yet once more the enthusiasm of the government towards the Tambú. On July 2<sup>nd</sup> Curaçao celebrates the National Anthem and Flag Day called locally *Dia di Himno i Bandera*. This is an official work-free day and during the whole day, throughout the whole island, there are celebrations and events to attend while there are two official ceremonies; one in the city that is attended by all the higher ranks in the government and the society and another one in the rural area of the island that is attended by some of the governmental officials.

During the official ceremony in the city capital *Otrabanda*, where all the officials were present, including the governor and a representative of the Dutch Royal family, an extended show was performed that incorporated every traditional musical performance of the Curaçao culture, except the Tambú. Every style of traditional music performed for the high ranked public, even the commercialized version of the *Seú* whereas the Tambú was no place to be heard until some five to six hours after the official ceremony ended, and only two songs were performed by the group *Zojojo* with *Mistika Stefania*, one of the leading Tambú-singers on the island. During the ceremony in the rural area *Banda Bou* on the other hand, the entire ceremony evolved around the Tambú and the *kachu*, another Afro-Curaçao musical tradition. The governor and the representative of the Dutch Royal family as well as the prime minister of the island, together with other officials, were not present at this ceremony. The negative stigma the Tambú still has within the society must have been responsible for this choice. But on the other hand it can be expected from the government to assume a more pioneering position into accepting the Tambú as a Curaçao cultural expression instead of adopting indiscriminately the negative stigma of the Tambú. That says a lot I believe about the approach of the government towards the Tambú and if the highest authority of cultural preservation does not believe in it, it becomes very difficult to propagate it positively to the rest of the society.

### **Repression from the Catholic Church**

So far I addressed the legal repression the Tambú encountered through its decades of existence which helped shape the actual cultural position of the Tambú; a state of exclusion within its own culture. This legal repression was enforced by the Catholic Church’s repression upon the Afro-Curaçao community. The Catholic Church had a predominant role in forming the society’s structure upon norms and values, religiously as well as socially and culturally. The Church was a fervent opponent of the African culture since the beginning of slavery and long after, during colonialism. According to the Church the customs of the African culture that arrived on the island along with the slaves were that of indecency, barbarism and diabolical adoration. In the eyes of the Church the Africans had no culture and therefore were not civilized. And so the aim of the Church was to bring culture and civilize the Africans according to the European



standard of culture and value while viewing the Africans clearly as inferior to them (Rosalia 1997: 163-165).

The Africans were forced to adopt more European-like customs even though they were never to be seen as equal due to their skincolour, something that was attributed in those days as the most important evidence of inferiority towards the European race (Bhabha 1983; 375). The African culture contained totally different philosophies and ideologies compared to the European's; it was more vivid with its dances full of corporal expression and combined with the scarcely application of clothes upon the body compared to the Europeans, the Catholic Church condemned an entire civilization as demonic and barbaric because it had in no sense any similarity with the European culture. Donald Morales, author of *The Pervasive Force of Music in African, Caribbean and African American Drama*, refers to the corporal expressions that can be found in African related music and dance as a dramatic production that replaces the language as a means to express emotions; a type of emotional expression that was unknown to the Europeans at the time (Morales 2003; 148).

After slavery, during colonization, it was the Church who maintained the higher form of control upon the former slaves by means of family guiding. This guiding of the family life was only applied on the poor families, meaning mainly the Afro-Curaçao community. These interventions went most of the time very far as to even giving the priests absolute rights in entering houses, even without the owner's permission, to do whatever he thought was necessary in the name of the Church (Rosalia 1997; 185-187). Many injustices and cruelty happened in the name of the Catholic Church in these houses but I will be referring further on only to the events that left deep scarves in the community regarding the Tambú.

The Church saw the Tambú as a blasphemy towards God and the Catholic Church that propagated obscenity, indecency as well as immorality, thus needed to be boycott and/or extinguished entirely. The campaign the church started was primarily against the woman, especially to induce her fear; because it was the woman who passed the education on at home and was at the same time the dominant figure within the Tambú-culture. The women were seen as the centre of families and therefore were the carriers of norms and values within a society from generation to generation. For the Tambú as well, it was the woman who was the voice and the carrier of the Tambú because she was the singer, the dancer and the poet or writer (Rosalia 1997; 223). If she would be eliminated from the Tambú scenery, the chance the Tambú would be terminated might be enormous, this at least according to the Church. So what the Church did was basically to take advantage of its moral position within the community and proclaimed that every woman who attended with the Tambú on one way or another would not be allowed into the church and therefore could not get married before the eyes of God; the worst of faiths for a woman, a 'decent' woman, in the eyes of society, not only the Afro-Curaçao community but the whole society in general. This form of moral repression was backed up by the authorities (Rosalia 1997; 224). Ania Lomba says about the role of women in colonies

Women were regarded as crucial markers of cultural difference in the colonies...The colonizers regarded women's position within the family and within religious practices as indicative of degenerate native culture. 'Reform' of women's position thus became central to colonial rule (2008: 161).

That is precisely what the Church did. They started a campaign that targeted the woman who participated on one way or another in the Tambú, as being immoral, indecent, a mundane woman who has no values which made her absolutely no marriage material. To achieve its goal more easy and effectively, the Church adapted a structure in which people from the own community could inform the Church about the ongoing around the Tambú and other cultural and social expression that were considered as inappropriate. The peoples who gave the Church valuable information received a sort of a moral recognition from the priest and therefore also a more elevated status within the same community. The struggle for acceptance, a sense of belonging, of the Afro-Curaçao individual is visible here; people were willing to go against their own culture in order to receive recognition from the dominant group, the Catholic Church in this case (Bhabha 1984).

The repression of the Church reinforced the negative dogma of fighting against each other within the community. People were telling against each other, something that established a sense

of distrustfulness within the community; people developed a lack of trust for their own people, something that nowadays is still very well present in the Curaçao society among the Afro-Curaçao community. People tend to trust a foreigner easier than they trust their own community. There is a constant need to destroy, especially if another person is doing better socially (Rosalia 1997; 225-226). I do believe that the root of this problem lies not only in the history of slavery, where also the slaves were punished by slaves who enjoyed a higher status in the eyes of the landowners, but that it was emphasized and enforced long after slavery by the Catholic Church.

The Catholic Church helped construct the idea that a European culture was elementary and needed to be assumed as a standard in order to achieve something in life, whether it is a better life out of poverty, recognition and acknowledgement from the community and/or society or to climb the social ladder of career achievements. In contrast to this supposedly perfect culture the own culture became something mediocre that marked the uncivilized and uneducated from the well acculturated among the community; it became something to be ashamed of instead of proud. Because of the external pressure to prove that the adopted identity was better than the own identity and probably also because usually the person in particular would have a huge disadvantage in matters of skin colour, the people from the Afro community adopted more strict customs and behaviour in order to prove themselves against the two identities. This constant struggle in between these two identities has been and still is the reason why its culture is so vulnerable from outer influences; internally there is still too much conflict which obstructs the formation of a solid and stable cultural identity.

## Conclusion

The role of the Catholic Church and the local governments throughout the years upon the cultural identification of the Tambú has been very influential and as such all the further developments around the Tambú evolved around the Church's and government's perception of the Tambú. The concept of who the Curaçao is, according to Jeanne Henriquez, structuralized by the government as being multicultural, an approach that she finds very dangerous because in the concept of multiculturalism the culture of the Afro-descendant will be marginalized again against the minority groups that predominates. For Henriquez and Gilbert Bacilio it seems as if the government is trying to push the society in a very subtle way to lean back again towards a cultural identity that does not belong to the *yu'i Kòrsou*.

Therefore, the relations between the government and the Curaçao community are very tense at the present time, as was also the case during and shortly after colonialism. For an island to have a government with politicians that still has not figured out who they are as a collective society can be and/or is very disastrous for the future developments of the island, whether these developments are culturally, socially or politically and economically. For the Tambú in particular these political actions can mean stagnation within its cultural developments and thus remaining in the position of constant negative stigmatization because the white binary would dominate the black binary as has been the case through history.

## The Tambú within the Curaçao Society

### Introduction

In the former chapter I have addressed the different forms of repression upon particularly the Afro-Curaçao community that consequently formed the basis of the Curaçao cultural development. In this chapter attention will be paid upon the way the Tambú developed within the society as a consequence of these several forms of repression. Curaçao underwent, together with the other Dutch-Caribbean islands, a colonial era that lasted for three centuries, followed by a decolonization plan that is still as unfinished as it was some fifty years ago. As up to this moment (that I'm writing this thesis) the everlasting struggle of independency and co-dependence between Curaçao and the Netherlands has reached its highest peak ever in years. This everlasting struggle has always influenced the Curaçao cultural behaviour dramatically as often choices were made by the local government against the cultural preservation of customs and

traditions. The idea of the government has been to take the 'good' example of the former colonizer even if this meant marginalizing their own culture (Bhabha; 1985).

As a consequence of the cultural marginalization many generations grew up without receiving proper education about their (meaning Curaçao) history and culture. Instead these generations grew up learning about the history, culture, norms and values of the former colonizer (the Netherlands) involving customs that were not even possible to apply in a warm climate. Therefore the ideal standard implied the assumption of a foreign identity in order to improve social life (Bhabha; 1984). In comparison to the European standard the island's own forms of cultural expressions, especially those with predominant African heritage, like the Tambú, were inferior and thus marginalized as something to be ashamed for rather than to be proud of. Those of the society who wanted to learn about the island's forms of cultural expression had to search on their own for information that was also scarcely available.

This meant that most of the Curaçao learned more about their culture when they had already established an identity, a split identity that consisted of who they needed to be to get further in life (social acceptance) which implicated a European standard and the popular cultural life, the way they spoke to each other, the predominant language (Papiamentu) to establish communication and the way they were accustomed to do their daily activities.

In this part of the thesis I want to analyze how the Tambú moves, develops and exists within the Curaçao cultural society in general. I will also explore how the cultural changes of the society affects/influences certain elements of the Tambú such as the songs and dance. Finally I will analyze the changes the Tambú as a cultural element and its continuation within the Curaçao cultural expression.

### **Tambú as a way of life**

For those who identifies with the Tambú<sup>16</sup>, it is not only a music but it represents a choice of viewing life, society and culture different from the rest of the society. Most of the persons I spoke with that identifies with the Tambú publicly used this exact term: Tambú is a way of life. As I understood from these persons, the way of life around the Tambú implies an open-mindedness and acceptance to things that are different from the own personal experience or cultural customs. It also stands for more respect towards life in general but especially towards nature and human encounters. The persons who qualify the Tambú as being a way of life are musicians, people who grew up in an environment where the afro-cultural expressions were predominant and a group of young Afro-Curaçao intellectuals who feels that there must be more acceptance and appreciation for the own culture.

All the musicians I spoke with that experience the Tambú as a way of life grew up in families that were involved in agriculture in the rural area and/or the Tambú, even in the days when it was repressed legally during colonialism; some of them were even forbidden to see about anything that had to do with the Tambú. But like José Zimmerman, one of my informants, puts it

*"My grandmother was a Tambú singer, she went almost every weekend to a Tambú gathering but we, as children and young teenagers, were not allowed to even watch a Tambú gathering, I did it anyway. When I turned sixteen years old I started to experiment with the instruments of the Tambú and thus my grandmother started taking me to the parties where she sang. I only started to seriously play the chapi (hoe) when living in the Netherlands to study. Eventually I think the elders were only trying to protect us from being stigmatized within the society".* (José Zimmerman; Curaçao 7 July 2008)

What Zimmerman suggests is that the elders tried to protect their children from being stigmatized by alienating them from the Tambú, a statement that was also made by Alvin Inesia, musician and teacher. Inesia told me that the elders did what they thought was best for their children with the knowledge they had at the time and that it is pointless to blame them for it<sup>17</sup>. The

---

<sup>16</sup> Not everyone identifies themselves openly with the Tambú; this due to the stigmatization of the Tambú in the Curaçao society since the colonial era where every form of afro cultural expressions were being repressed. Though nowadays there are more doors opening for the Tambú and other afro cultural expression, the Tambú is still suppressed in terms of expressing it publicly; even in the afro community itself.

<sup>17</sup> Taped interview; Curaçao 12 May 2008

idea of alienation towards the own culture in order to belong to another culture, that is seen by the majority as a superior culture, has been also addressed by Homi Bhabha. In *Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse* (1984), Bhabha defines mimicry as

“The representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal (...) the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which appropriates the Other as it visualizes power.” (Bhabha 1984; 126)

In order for the older generation’s children to have a better life the older generation tried to intensify the sentiment of negativity towards the Tambú culture in the hope that their children could grow up becoming more like the dominating class in order to obtain the same chances as the dominating class while the older generation themselves continued to express themselves culturally within the Tambú-culture as well as other more afro forms of cultural expressions. Inesia suggests that what the older generation did not understand at the time was that even though the child got alienated from its culture to embrace another culture, and thus becoming the Other<sup>18</sup>, she/he would be “*almost the same, but not quite*”, meaning that she/he would not have the same chances as the dominant group anyway because they might look like the dominant group, but they will not be seen as the same through the eyes of the dominant group (Bhabha 1984; 126).

Despite the alienation these musicians grew up in, it was not sufficient to extract the Afro-Curaçao culture in its entirety from their cultural experience. For Zimmerman, the fact that the Afro-Curaçao cultural expressions, in this case the Tambú, did survive the internal alienation and the repression is a sign of its strength which makes it worth preserving<sup>19</sup>. This strength is also, according to Zimmerman, the most important characteristic of the Tambú being a way of life. The strength of the Tambú is also found in the mentality of its partisans who believes that the instruments of the Tambú can serve as an object to bring the human closer to nature where she/he can relax and recharge energy; she/he can thus obtain the required strength through the Tambú in order to face challenges in life.

The Tambú as a way of life also represents and propagates mutual respect. The hierarchical classification within the Tambú emphasizes upon respect for the fellow human being, whether it be the instruments-players, the singers or dancers as well as for the whole society in general<sup>20</sup>. The whole structure embodies the notion that mutual respect as a matter of good manners; it is a sign of being brought up with norms and values. Unlike the idea that the Tambú would instigate into violent behaviour and aggression, an idea brought into the society during colonialism by the colonizers, the Tambú tries to vindicate the importance of respect as a key instrument to live successfully in a community among people with different ethnical, cultural and social backgrounds. Morty Geertruida<sup>21</sup> told me that the whole concept of the Tambú evolved around living in harmony and having respect for fellow human beings as well as nature. He said to remember that during a Tambú gathering, if someone would misbehave (meaning disrespect someone) in one way or another, whether it be to a musician or people of the audience, the music would stop at once while the misbehaved person in particular would be thrown out of the gathering and only afterwards the music would continue again. Moreover, according to Geertruida, that person in particular would be banned from every Tambú gathering in the future

---

<sup>18</sup> My use of the Other here is the same as Bhabha in *Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse* (1984); the Other represents the superior and/or predominating culture and identity of the conqueror.

<sup>19</sup> With internal alienation I refer to the consequences of self-repression practiced into the Afro-Curaçao community whereby the alienation of the own culture was passed on from generation to generation.

<sup>20</sup> The hierarchical classification consisted of unwritten rules of behaviour towards the elders, who enjoyed a very privileged position, but also towards everyone attending a Tambú gathering. The hierarchical classification was not based upon financial capacity, considering that most of these people were poor or at least had very humble incomes, but rather upon knowledge, experience and upon how much talented a person was. This was a form to give respect and appreciation to the people who maintained the Tambú alive, especially during the times of repression, and this respect and appreciation for the *labariano* (people who did outstanding work within the Tambú) stretched also outside the Tambú and reached the Afro-Curaçao community in its entirety; these people were respected in the Afro community even though many within the Afro-Curaçao community itself were trying to alienate themselves and their families from the Tambú (Rosalia 1997; 225).

<sup>21</sup> Taped interview; Curaçao 1 July 2008

and she/he would be stamped as antisocial and unmannered in the Afro-Curaçao community in general, even within the group that does not attend to the Tambú.

What I encountered to be very interesting is that none of the people that I spoke with, which sees the Tambú as a way of life, are performers or fans of the modern Tambú. They all perform and acknowledge the older version of the Tambú as to pertain to the way of life concerning Tambú. The reason they gave hereof is that the notes played on the bari in the modern Tambú does not go deeper, it stays very superficial and therefore has not sufficient depth to get someone into a relaxing/meditation position. Another reason is that the sense of respect is almost lost in the modern Tambú culture; there is more a tendency of making money existing in the Tambú culture of today and it reflects itself into the way the musicians compete with each other, mostly by singing songs against each other in order to sell more records. Besides the money drift it must be taken into consideration that the society of nowadays is also completely different as some sixty years ago; people dare to do and say more nowadays than was the case some fifty to sixty years ago, and thus the social boundaries as to what is acceptable and what is not has changed drastically. This is not an issue of Curaçao but rather the case in the whole world. Therefore the meaning of what is respectful and what is not has become more flexible compared to some sixty years ago. Whether this is a good thing or a bad thing will not be discussed in this thesis. Although I must say that this might be an explanation for the fact that the key element that propagated the old-style Tambú as a way of life, the mutual respect, might be seen as lost or non-existent within the modern Tambú.

### **The Cultural changes expressed in the songs and dance of the Tambú**

The songs of the Tambú are mostly inspirations from incidents in the society. This is not standard though; the songs can also be inspired from personal experiences or can be used as a way to express emotions like happiness, disappointment, love or sorrow. At the early beginnings of the Tambú, up until microphones and music recording studios were introduced to the island in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the singers were accustomed to improvise songs while performing, they did not write the songs in advance as became later the case (Rosalia 1997: 62-63). Because the songs were improvised at the spot the audience made a more crucial role in the themes of the songs than is the case nowadays where the songs are written in advance<sup>22</sup>.

There is more distance between the audience and the songs of the modern Tambú in matters of emotions because the songs are now written in advance, recorded and lastly performed for the audience. The element of active participation from part of the audience is not present anymore within the Tambú; instead the singer/writer will write and sing what she/he 'thinks' the audience would like to hear and thus their choice might influence the audience positively or negatively, regarding the emotion the audience attach to the songs and so giving the lyrics another meaning than the songwriter's meaning to the song (Pellegram 1998; 111).

Not only the meaning the audience gave to the lyrics changed, also the way the Tambú in general was seen changed; the significance the Tambú in general had within the Afro-Curaçao community and the Curaçao society changed. The rhythms and songs of the Tambú have been identified through its history with struggle, protest and revolution but this identity has been lost at the end of the 70's when the social revolution seemed to have ended on the island. The songs obtained more a character of entertainment rather than revolution as it used to be. Depending on the affair described in the songs they are written in a satirical, sarcastic or an approach of direct attack but were still a mere form of entertainment. So the political themes attached to the songs

---

<sup>22</sup> The audience would in various occasions throw a phrase at the singer which on its turn would start improvising on the phrase received. If the person who throw the phrase to the singer or someone else in the audience would feel identified with the lyrics the singer used they would give the singer money for the song. This phenomenon is called *plaka na boka* (money on the mouth). The money was literally pushed into the mouth of the singer while singing, the person who put *plaka na boka* of the singer could ask for repetition of the part of the lyric she/he liked the most; this was also done as a way to show appreciation and respect for the singer's skill to improvise. After repeating the part of the lyric the singer would receive again *plaka na boka*. The amount of money could go sometimes up to 50 guilders per song, an amount that was seen as a lot of money at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A good singer, a *labariano*, could receive even 600 guilders on *plaka na boka* in one night; this was a fortune at the time. This activity has diminished increasingly in the Tambú community of today but still exists; it probably diminished due to a more passive role of the audience nowadays in comparison with the audience back in the older days (Rosalia 1983: 37-38).

of the olden days remained, though less sharp addressed as it used to be the case. The major reason of the loss of 'power' might also be due to the fact that people do not need to struggle that hard anymore, as was the case in the 70's and 80's. For Gilbert Bacilio<sup>23</sup>, policy consultant of the local government, the reason lies in the fact that after the equality movements of the 70's and 80's people forgot the need to stay alert and got too relaxed which also sort of softened what the Tambú represented in the Afro-Curaçao community and the Curaçao society in general; the use and/or meaning of the language of the lyrics changed.

Apart from the meaning people link to a song, the language is an important element which fortifies the representation of a song. Though the Tambú is associated nowadays with the Papiamentu as official and original language of the Tambú, this has not always been the case. During the early developments of the Tambú, in the times of slavery and shortly afterwards, the language of the Tambú was a Creole language called Guení, an African dialect that got mangled with the Portuguese of the former Angolan colonizers mixed with the Dutch and Spanish of the colonizers on the island. At the early beginnings of the Papiamentu it was a language of the elite brought to the island by the Jewish merchants who left Brazil to establish themselves on the island (Arion 2002: 68-69). The shift from Guení to Papiamentu had probably to do with the stigmatization of the Guení-speakers in the society.

The people who spoke the Guení were probably identified as illiterate, uneducated and inferior because of their past enslavement. To master the language Papiamentu would have meant to obtain an opportunity to a better life out of poverty and marginalization. The self-repression of the Guení in its own community led to its extinction, vanishing from its own culture. When the language changed, the shift from Guení to Papiamentu, the cultural representation changed as well and thus the meaning-system of the culture changed simultaneously (Gardiner & Kosmitzki 2008; 129).

The change in language, from Guení to Papiamentu is possibly also partially responsible for the choice of lyrics and the style of writing, although these two factors might not have been the only reason for this change. The lyrics in the traditional composition of the Tambú were written in metaphors and proverbs to indicate an issue without becoming aggressive, vulgar or disrespectful towards the listeners<sup>24</sup>. The use of metaphors and proverbs was a common way to speak in the Afro-Curaçao community. This style of speaking, using metaphors and proverbs, was applied only by the Afro-Curaçaoans; the white community who spoke Papiamentu did not use this style of speech, no specific reason as to why but probably due to beliefs of inferiority and illiteracy towards the Afro-Curaçao community. Considering the fact that the Tambú was mainly something of the Afro-Curaçao community it is plausible to assume that what was estimated as normal was incorporated in the lyrics as a means of representing the community; it formed the collective cultural representation of the Afro-Curaçao community (Hall 2003; 19-20).

Not everyone could make a perfect lyric for a tambú song in the older days, it was considered to be something very complex that required a lot of inventiveness and the skill to play with words. The persons who were capable of such skills were highly admired and respected within the community which was mostly emphasized by means of gifts and also by receiving a privileged position in the community. The modern Tambú on the other hand does not apply on a regular basis (though there are some exceptions) the use of metaphors and proverbs as a standard in the lyrics anymore. An explanation for this matter could be the fact that this style of speaking does not exist in the Papiamentu of today; the Papiamentu which uses metaphors and proverb as a standard is seen as old-fashioned nowadays and is daily used only by a few within the community, mainly the elderly of the community. The lyrics of the modern Tambú are based on the street language, a very bold and direct choice of words that applies gossip and rumor as a weapon against the opponent in the hope to provoke her/him to respond upon the accusations.

This says something about the society in general because what a society sees and/or finds normal will be reflected within this particular society's cultural expression. Regarding of the fact

---

<sup>23</sup> Taped interview Gilbert Bacilio; Curaçao 4 June 2008

<sup>24</sup> The traditional composition of the Tambú knows three sorts of lyrics: the lyric called *tambú télelele*, the lyric called *tambú wèis kòrtiku* (short note tambú) and the lyric called *tambú wèis largu* (long note tambú with words). The lyric of the *tambú télelele* is the oldest style of lyrics known today.

that all the society or a group within this society accepts this form of behaviour or not<sup>25</sup>, the choice will be manifested culturally within the society. The manifestation within the society happens because there is a group within that identifies themselves with this particular choice of words within the language (Hall 2003; 36-37).

By analyzing the lyrics of the songs through the decades I found a sort of pattern in the change of choice of words for the lyrics. It is like the message in the lyrics becomes understandable along with the changes of wording the lyrics. As an example I will use one lyric of the traditional Tambú, one of the modern Tambú and lastly a lyric written in a combination of both traditional and modern<sup>26</sup>. Here follows a short example of lyric belonging to the traditional Tambú; the song is called *Recordar es vivir* by the late Shon Kolá<sup>27</sup>.

Télelele...Telelalala...lalala

Response: télelele telelalala

Oh, drum player, tell me what your name is for if in case you got "sick", I could call you by the name

Response: télelele telelalala

Nowadays if you have a secret don't trust no friend, he/she will trust another and before you know the secret is on the street

(Quoted by Rosalia 1983: 43-44)

The song *Recordar es vivir* is a testimony of the life Shon Kolá had where he is implying that he has been through a lot but that those memories formed him and his life. The title is an example of a catchy foreign language applied, in this case, with the purpose of amusement. The word *sick* in the lyric is a metaphor for a bad musician and has not the literal meaning of the word. In the modern lyrics the 'feelings' of a bad musician would not have been spared, the modern lyric would have put the name of the bad musician as well as mentioned that she/he is a bad performer. The *télelele* style is not used frequently anymore in the modern Tambú.

The second example is that of a modern lyric, applied in the modern Tambú. Here follows a piece of a lyric called *Churendy kore bai laga nan*<sup>28</sup> (Churendy run along and leave them behind).

Declaration: The American can not accept  
That neither silver nor gold  
Was left over for them  
They quickly arranged a messy thing  
Combined with falseness  
Thinking they could brake our happiness

Declaration: A foot in a foot out

Response: Run along and leave them behind

(Darwin Borgschot)

The purpose of this lyric is to criticize the American's behavior as well as to show unconditional support to Churendy, telling him through the Tambú that even though he did not received the silver medal, he still finished second after the world record runner from Jamaica. The choice of words lacks creativity while there is no use of metaphors or proverbs; the words are raw and plain and have no second connotation. It only means what it says. Also remarkable to mention is that this Tambú was not recorded but was forwarded through the internet from e-mail to e-mail. Besides from having modern lyrics also modern forms of communication was applied for a more effective distribution.

---

<sup>25</sup> In this case the choice of words or boldness of words in the language.

<sup>26</sup> In the English translations of the lyrics, especially of the traditional Tambú the metaphors in the wording is not very clear but I will attempt to explain the metaphor as keen as possible.

<sup>27</sup> This type of lyric is called Tambú *télelele* and it is the oldest style of lyrics known today. This style of lyric is applied when the singer wants to make a testimony and was particularly improvised at the spot during performances.

<sup>28</sup> During the Olympic games of 2008 in China, the Curaçaon athlete Churendy Martina ended up second in the 200meters run but after receiving the silver medal was disqualified because the American athlete, who ended up at the fourth place, complained that Churendy's foot touched the white line. The island reacted very emotional towards the matter because people thought it to be very unfair towards Churendy. In less than a week a Tambú emerged describing the situation and the emotions around the matter.

The last example is of a combination of both styles. This type of lyric is written using metaphors, yet easier to decipher in comparison with the traditional lyric and uses an elaborate amount of historical facts of the Afro-Curaçao community in the lyrics. Here follows an example; the lyric is from a song called *Dan wak'aki* (It's enough!) performed by the late Ivy Rosalia.

Declaration: Big boss tolls the bell  
For us to start working  
It is just today we decided  
That we don't want to be exploited

Declaration: Oh big boss

Response: It is enough

Decl. It is over with the abuse

(Quoted by Rosalia 1997: 67-68)

The words in this lyric are chosen as such that the listeners understand immediately what is being sung. The title *Dan wak'aki* comes from the Guení and is not used anymore in the spoken Papiamentu of today and forms the historical element in the song. This lyric has a political message telling the dominant ruling class that the working class is not going to accept being exploited anymore; it's enough. The first phrase in the declaration is used as a metaphor and it refers to the times of slavery when the landowner's peon would toll the bell to announce to the slaves on the plantations that it was time to work.

When taking the old songs into consideration I found out that the social issues that were sang were all about the inequalities and racial problems on the island at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The songs were about the huge gap that existed between the European and Afro-Curaçao community but also about the increasing and total poverty that existed within especially the Afro-Curaçao community. The songs had more impact in the society some five to six decades ago only due to their political statement but also because of the huge gap that existed between black and white, therefore the emotions people attached to these songs made the lyrics so powerful and thus increased the fear of change within the dominant group (Pellegram 1998; 112).

The modern Tambú is more meant for entertainment; it does criticize social, economical and political affairs as well but not with such a strong voice as the traditional Tambú used to do. Probably because the emotions felt in the 70's and 80's regarding matters of equality are not that strong anymore. It is not necessary either because there have been many improvements throughout the decades in matters of equality though not completely accomplished yet. Things work socially much easier nowadays so that the feelings of 'desperation' due to poverty or inequality are not predominant anymore; the emotions linked to the lyrics and the themes of the lyrics together with the bolder wording of the lyrics has weakened the 'force' of the lyrics.

The cultural changes influenced besides the Tambú-songs also the dance; is the vital ingredient to give the Tambú performance the finishing touch. The dance is mainly performed by the audience present and joined in occasionally by the singer and backup singers. The role of the man and woman is strictly classified in the dance. It symbolize a flirting role-play where it is expected from the male to lure the female whereas the female pretend not to be interested in the advances of the male. Besides being a flirtatious dance, the dance of the Tambú used to have a more spiritualistic connotation. When the Tambú was still performed as a religious act it was used to bring the man in contact with the spiritual world; the dance was supposed to get the dancer into a certain trance which made it possible to connect with the spirits, a sort of a ritual dance. The Tambú in the form of ritual dance does not exist any more in the public area; it went underground since the repression of the Tambú and never recovered its rights of being a religious expression<sup>29</sup>.

The dance of the Tambú was the most important element of mutual respect that existed within the Tambú-culture. The only obligated rule within the Tambú-culture was that everyone needed to

---

<sup>29</sup> It remained in the sphere of being demonic; it is still a taboo as of today. People who identify themselves publicly with the religious purpose of the Tambú are viewed very negatively in the society, they can become socially excluded from activities in the districts they live or are insulted as to be a *hasidó di brua* (witchcraft practitioner), something that has a very negative connotation in the local society.



show respect to everyone by means of certain forms of behaviour, especially the dance<sup>30</sup>. The far most important rule during the dance is that the male and female do not touch each other even though the role-playing suggests that they might be touching each other during the luring.

Contrary to the traditional dance, within the modern Tambú the contact between the man and the woman during the luring in the dance is stimulated and executed broadly during parties and gatherings. This has been used as a very important factor to propagandize everything that evolved around the Tambú as negative and vulgar. Especially the ethic norms that were predominant in the traditional Tambú have disappeared, something that the musicians of the older generation regret utterly. According to the older generation it is because of the decay in moral values that the beauty of the dance has disappeared and instead was replaced by men and women dancing vulgarly during the parties. With vulgar the older generation refers to the way that men and women touches each other while dancing in ways that assimilates sexual intercourse between a man and a woman.

Many people I spoke with about the 'image' of the modern Tambú believe that the touching between man and woman that was attributed to the dance are the consequences of outer influences that arrived on the island. International dances with predominant African roots and rhythms whereby the dances are performed assimilating sexual intercourse might have contributed to mimicry within the Tambú. It is possible that this mimicry started from the idea that what came from the outside was better than what was already on the island. Again the idea of the own culture not being good enough is represented here which induce the need to elevate what comes from the outside to be better than the own culture (Bhabha 1984; 129).

Another explanation for this change in dance pattern can be sought in Yvonne Daniel's statement where she implies that dance structures are comparative to cultural symbols of social relations (1995; 141). For this point of view this change in dance structure is agreeable because the social structures whereupon society is constructed have changed tremendously through the decades; what used to be socially condemned as immoral a few decades ago can be socially acceptable nowadays. Donny Mercelina<sup>31</sup>, a musician from the older generation, says that the loss of elegance in the dance combined with the touching during the dance is responsible for the degeneration of the Tambú. Donny refers to the lack of respect that is represented in the perspective of the new dance, to be specific, the touching of man and woman in a very intense way. That type of dance is for Donny the brake of morals and mutual respect that has been lost in the Tambú. It also implies, as mentioned earlier, the social and moral boundaries that has changed considerably lately, not only on Curaçao but the entire world.

Morty Geertruida<sup>32</sup> agrees with Mercelina's point of view. For Geertruida the degeneration of the dance has been one of the major reasons why the people from the older generation who love the Tambú stopped going to the parties. According to Geertruida the dance of the Tambú was a beautiful piece of art before it transformed to what it is now: a dance that, for Geertruida, lacks any form of respect to the self and/or the other person. Interestingly enough, it is not only the older generation that has this sentiment towards the modern dance of the Tambú; also the young generation and fans of the modern Tambú points the dance out as one of the major issues that obstructs the Tambú from cleaning its name. Rendel Rosalia told me that when he goes to a gathering and people starts behaving like that, he leaves because

*"When the tension increase, so will the chance for fights to break out; if for example a jealous ex-boyfriend sees his ex-girlfriend doing such things on the dance-floor...(..)...but besides that, it [the dance] is plain distasteful and vulgar how they do it now". (Rendel Rosalia; Curaçao 12 June 2008)*

Luckily there are exceptions to this rule of dance; nowadays more young people are choosing deliberately to dance the Tambú in what is considered to be a decent way without all the touching

---

<sup>30</sup> The musicians also applied certain forms of behaviour as to show their fellow musicians respect. For example: when a bari-player wanted to play for a while he would touch the skin of the bari while the other is playing from behind and the player would respond by standing up and allowing the other musicians to play. If the player would not stand up it was seen as an act of disrespect towards the musician.

<sup>31</sup> Taped interview; Curaçao 11 July 2008

<sup>32</sup> Taped interview; Curaçao 12 July 2008

and even attributing modern dance choreographies into it, like for example the choreography called brake dance.

### **The Tambú as a cultural element**

Due to centuries of repression and the indoctrinated idea of the self being inferior and uncivilized the ethnic group that forms the vast majority on the island has been the one who has lost continuously cultural heritages in the Curaçao society. There is still the negative connotation of the Tambú as being something to be ashamed of. People I met on the streets of the city capital or at events were very reluctant in admitting feeling identified by the Tambú culture because they did not want to be 'marked' as uneducated and/or vulgar.

The role of the woman which was once so predominant in the Tambú is now secondarily in role in comparison with the man. The woman has been the most repressed in the Tambú-movement especially by the Catholic Church because she was seen as the carrier of culture within the family construction. Therefore, the woman practiced an even harsher form of self-repression upon herself and family that was passed on from generation to generation. What was passed on of the Tambú-movement was according to the cultural codes left over from the self-repression employed by the women as educator of the family institution. The female passed the Tambú on according to her interpretation of what was good or wrong within the Tambú (Gledhill 2003; 376). The attendance of women in Tambú activities is still very fragile due to the internal repression within the community. The male on the other hand remains free from gossip but is defined by people who does not want to be related to the Tambú upon the island as dumb and violent, something which, according to these groups, lies within the psyche of the black man (Hall 2003; 263). The supposedly violent psyche of the black man is targeted as the reason for aggressiveness at Tambú parties even though no form of investigation has been done upon the matter. It is rather a superstition that remained from the negative campaign the dominant group together with the Catholic Church and the government pulled against the Tambú during colonialism.

Whereas it was portrayed to induce into aggression and negativism, the Tambú being a music-style, served as merely a means of comfort and entertainment for the Afro-Curaçao community. Music is an instrument to express the feelings of dissatisfaction while at the same time music is a cultural element which, in this case the Afro-Curaçao community could identify themselves with. Therefore the Tambú got converted from music into an object of accentuation for mutual cultural behavioral representation/recognition (Morales 2003; 146).

As an element of cultural representation as well as cultural identification the Tambú has experienced several forms of oppression. Rene Rosalia<sup>33</sup> told me that in the 50's and 60's the Tambú almost disappeared completely from the Afro-Curaçao culture due to the self imposed censorship that lived within the community. Especially the role of the female in the Tambú was completely subjected to the Church's will; to brake the foundation of the Tambú as an element of cultural representation the Church targeted the role of the Afro-Curaçao male and female within the community as well as in the Curaçao society in general. Rene Rosalia explained furthermore that every female who was publicly seen at a Tambú event or who publicly related to the Tambú were banned from the Church, could not receive any of the sacraments and if died would be buried outside the walls of the church's cemetery.

Receiving the church's sacraments was the most important in those days, especially the sacrament of marriage for women. The female constructed her identity as an individual and as a member of the community around the meaning the sacrament of marriage had in the community in order to be accepted within the community (Loomba 2008; 152). The male on the other hand constructed an individual and collective identity around political oppression and stigmatization of characteristic behaviour. Whereas the female was denied marriage in Church, the male was thrown into jail by the police or military police if caught doing anything with the Tambú. If the male still persisted with the Tambú, false charges of lunacy were put upon him with the authorization of the deputy in order to lock him up in a madhouse (Rosalia 1997; 222).

---

<sup>33</sup> Taped interview; Curaçao 3 June 2008

Despite the oppression the male had more liberty to involve himself with the Tambú compared to the female who, before the repression, occupied the primary role. The female was reduced to secondary role whereas the man obtained the primordial role in the Tambú. As such, it was upon his perceptions and experiences that the new identity of the Tambú was created (Rosalia 1997; 224). The image the Afro-Curaçao male received within the Curaçao society was related to the political oppression; Afro-Curaçao men who were involved in the Tambú were stamped as outlaws and criminals, whereas the women were identified according to religious repression and thus portrayed to be indecent and supporters of a mundane life. The development of Tambú representation evolved around these identifications in female/male role within the society. It is comprehensible that an identity that took decades to develop and establish within the society can not change in a swift of time. Yet, if the wish to bring a change in the development pattern of representation of the Tambú, new opportunities to create new representational patterns need to be asserted of a new cultural representation for the Tambú in the Curaçao society.

To reshape the existing Tambú identity within the Curaçao society and prevent negative stigma in Tambú's future developments, non-profit organizations and the cultural departments of Curaçao are promoting culture as a modern and intellect way of life in order to stimulate the young group of the society into active participation. Cultural programs are inviting the people to participate actively in order to learn and understand their own culture better by means of workshops, seminars and exhibitions. Jeanne Henriquez<sup>34</sup> calls this phenomenon a cultural revolution that is concentrated mainly among the youth, the younger generation. She believes that in order to establish a more stable and positive identity for the Tambú, it is compulsory to include the young ones directly within cultural developments so that they can create a possible nucleus wherefrom a new and more conscientious cultural identity may spread throughout the whole community and society. More youth need to be attracted to the cultural conceptualization, according to Henriquez, otherwise the culture will not be able to develop and outgrow the negative identity of the past.

Rene Rosalia<sup>35</sup> agrees with Henriquez but points out that the youth, besides from being attracted to participate actively into the cultural conceptualization, needs to be proper educated in their culture and history before they are sent out to attract more youth otherwise the cultural essence might get lost anyways. Rene Rosalia explains furthermore that

*"The automatic natural trespass of traditions from father to son or mother to daughter does not exist anymore as it used to be the case in the history of oral traditions. Nowadays a youth learns to play, sing and dance the Tambú by means of her/his CD player; she/he might learn perfectly how to play, dance and sing the Tambú but apart from that she/he would have no further information as to the music's origin, meaning and so on until she/he attends a workshop, seminar or exhibition."* (Rene Rosalia; Curaçao, 3 June 2008)

If the youth does not receive proper training as to the whereabouts of its own culture, according to Rene, the cultural conceptualization will be doomed to fail because the lack of information will make it easier to move further away from the cultural centre. Gilbert Bacilio<sup>36</sup> argues and believes that in order to attract more youth into the cultural conceptualization it is compulsory that the courses of local history, language and arts be introduced into the educational system as mandatory courses so that the youth can familiarize with its own culture. Bacilio also believes that more workshops or lessons in traditional instruments can inspire the youth to embrace its culture in order to foment more youth participation in the cultural conceptualization.

Beside the internal identity conflicts and struggle there are also international improvements booked with the Tambú which may put the identity developments around it in a more positive perspective. Thanks to globalization musical barriers are almost non-existent and the Tambú took advantage of it by going outside its frontiers. Nowadays Tambú is being applied in far more spheres of jazz, mezzo-soprano, academy dance and theatre all over the world. These positive developments reached the islanders according to my informants and are stimulating them to do

---

<sup>34</sup> Taped interview; Curaçao 18 July 2008

<sup>35</sup> Taped interview; Curaçao 3 June 2008

<sup>36</sup> Taped interview; Curaçao 4 July 2008

more with their own culture, not necessarily upon the Tambú alone, but upon all cultural areas in order to establish more understanding as to who and what defines the Curaçao identity.

On the island itself more international offices are very enthusiastic in embracing the Tambú tradition of the end of the year. My informants told me that huge international offices established on the island that have generally European or American identities are hiring them to perform during the offices New Years parties, something that up to six years ago was not the case. People of every ethnic group upon the island are not only acknowledging the *Tambú di fin di aña* (Tambú of the end of the year) but they are also accepting it and are participating in it, two things very essential in order to be able to reshape the cultural identity around the Tambú.

## Conclusion

The majority of people I spoke with on the streets and during cultural events I visited during my fieldwork pointed out that it is because the dance has become so vulgar, aggressive, showing no respect for the self and the audience, that the Tambú is still in so much trouble as to maintain its position stable in the Curaçao Culture. People I spoke with who loves the Tambú on the other hand also pointed out that because of the style of dancing the *hende desente*<sup>37</sup> (decent people) does not go to a Tambú party easily regardless of the fact that they love it. So nowadays the culprit responsible for the negative stigma of the Tambú is the dance, which is viewed as the major problem within the Tambú and hence makes it difficult for a Tambú-lover to identify itself publicly with the Tambú; it is not the music, not the singers or the rhythm but it is the dance.

It has been made clear that the emotion attached to respect is elementary when it comes to defining what is 'good' or 'wrong' within the Tambú-culture of nowadays. To quote Andrea Pellegram, author of *The Message in Paper* (1998), she believes whether something that encountered change (in this case cultural change) might be good or wrong for what it represents is

“...an emotional and primitive response to something that provides a sensory stimulus and is characterized by informed perceptions and assumptions; it is what ‘seems right’ or ‘feels wrong’ in the social and material context of a situation”. (Pellegram 1998; 112-113)

Moral degradation is becoming or already has become the responsible factor of cultural diminution of the Tambú in the Curaçao society. Many alleged this moral degradation as a lack of respect which is particularly seen through the changes the dance underwent. The ‘force’ the lack of respect has upon this cultural expression is seen in the way that people are stigmatized within the community because of their personal choice in expressing themselves through the Tambú. That makes the people very reluctant in admitting their love for the Tambú publicly. The lack of respect, together with the loss of freedom in the performance, is also the most important reason why musicians of the older generation such as Donny Mercelina and Morty Geertruida decided to quit the Tambú performances. This same lack of respect has induced the younger generation to bring more positive vibes again within the Tambú by means of intertwining the old and new together in the dance but also in the style of playing making sure in their own way the continuation of the Tambú; probably with a new interpretation or the way of life of Tambú but yet with the hope to let the Tambú survive culturally.

---

<sup>37</sup> With ‘hende desente’ the people I spoke with refers to the people who does not identify themselves with the way of dancing the Tambú that propagates touching between man and woman on the dance-floor that might go as far as to assimilate sexual intercourse between man and woman while dancing. This statement shows also how deep the stigmatization within the community goes.

## The Yu'i Kòrsou and the Tambú

### Introduction

So far in this thesis attention has been paid upon the aspects around the cultural elements whereupon the Tambú might and/or has an influence. In this last chapter of this thesis, before heading towards the final conclusion, this chapter will be focusing briefly upon the views of the Curaçaoans upon themselves, their society and their cultural identity regarding ethnicity. I will be also addressing the possibilities that are currently available for a cultural development of the Tambú within the Curaçaoan society. All of which are experiences I have encountered during my fieldwork on the island of Curaçao in 2008.

In the former chapters of this thesis the point of view of the Curaçaoan society was addressed linked to the cultural elements that are relevant for the Tambú development within the Curaçaoan society. However, there is also the opinion of the island's citizens as to matter of where they do believe the Tambú belong or should belong when it comes to representing a collectivity within the island's cultural expression. By paying attention to this additional information the question whether the Tambú can be used to construct a collective ethnic identity for the citizens of Curaçao can receive an answer more suitable to the current situation upon the island.

Therefore attention will be paid to the view of the island's citizens as to whom they do qualify as a *yu'i Kòrsou* and who are not qualified as such together with the relevant reasons for their choice. And finally due to a lack of congruity when it comes to the cultural position of the Tambú upon the island I will draw attention to the current possibilities available upon the island for the Tambú to develop culturally in order to be able to contribute to a collective ethnic identity for the inhabitants of the island.

### A *yu'i Kòrsou* according to a *yu'i Kòrsou*

It is a common fact on the island of Curaçao that every islander has its own version of definition as to whether someone is or not a *yu'i Kòrsou*. It must be point out here that until 2002 there has not been an official definition to the denomination of a *yu'i Kòrsou* in social and cultural matters besides the legal denomination of a Curaçaoan which stipulates that anyone born on the island is as such recognized<sup>38</sup>. The first official denomination of the term came in 2002 with the inauguration of the cultural foundation Kas di Kultura (House of Culture). This foundation was brought to life by the local government in an attempt to revive cultural awareness within the society while propagating the human rights of every citizen to participate and enjoy its culture and the arts.

The foundation has also put an official denomination for the term *Yu'i Kòrsou* on paper to propagate cultural diversity, mutual respect and tolerance. According to the foundation a *yu'i Kòrsou* is

“the one who lives on Curaçao or outside Curaçao who fulfils the following criteria: she/he speaks and understand Papiamentu, is willing to work for the island's progress, is able to declare against the world that she/he is *yu'i Kòrsou* and accepts its culture and history without any form of shame, who accepts and lives with and/or within the Curaçao's multicultural situation and accepts cultural diversity, who does not consider the cultural elements of her/his ethnic group as the culture of Curaçao but rather as a part of the culture of Curaçao, who accepts that Afro-Curaçaoan elements dominates the major part of the culture of Curaçao”. (Social Report Kas di Kultura 2001; 10)

By applying the definition, as mentioned above, to the *yu'i Kòrsou* Kas di Kultura acknowledges that though the African elements are predominant in the island's culture and/or history they are not the sole basis of the Curaçaoan culture. Therefore, besides establishing a new standard for the

---

<sup>38</sup> The term Curaçaoan and the term *Yu'i Kòrsou* might refer to the same definition in literature but in popular language there is a difference. This difference is mostly linked to an emotion rather than on a fact. Both denominations appeals to a person born on the island; the difference lies in the fact that being born alone on the island is not enough to be a *Yu'i Kòrsou*, the person has to be able to speak Papiamentu with what is considered to be a native accent as well as participating actively into the popular culture.

definition *yu'i Kòrsou*, the foundation also acknowledges the cultural homogenization that was inevitable to encounter among the ethnic groups that settled during the centuries on the island. For the formation of a collective cultural identity it is not possible to ignore the ethnicity of the other groups because through their ethnicity they pass cultural customs over within the Curaçao society and as such, though in their minority, influences the cultural customs of the majority group, in this case the Afro-Curaçao ethnic group (Bhabha 1992; 54-55).

Unlike the definition applied by the foundation, the definition of a *yu'i Kòrsou*, according to the island's citizens, is more judged by appearance, namely, skincolour, hair and/or other physical (ethnic) features and language compared to the definition applied by Kas di Kultura. After talking to people from various social groups on the island it has been made clear that a person is mostly judged by her/his appearances as to being a *yu'i Kòrsou* or not, this mainly at first impression.

The darker the colour of the skin the greater the chance the person is immediately seen as *yu'i Kòrsou*. Besides the colour of the skin a person can also be judged by the type of hair and facial features. Afterwards, if the judgment upon appearance has not been successful, the person is then judged upon whether she/he has the proper accent (native) and if the Papiamentu is spoken fluently. As mentioned earlier in this thesis, for Stuart Hall it is the language that a group chooses to communicate mutually the most important element to defy a culture and an ethnic identity for that group in particular (2003). Ania Loomba adds to Hall's statement that besides being elementary as a recognition point within a group it is also through language that a group makes its ideologies static by means of literature or music for example (2008). But it is also the use of language to static ideologies what causes division within a group besides other features such as type of hair, skincolour and so forth. In other words, the chance a person with European features and a light colour of skin has to be judged by appearance as a *yu'i Kòrsou* depends whether she/he speaks Papiamentu fluently or with a so called native accent.

Though the foundation has made a new definition for the *yu'i Kòrsou* in the attempt to make it static in order to bring a new concept of the *yu'i Kòrsou* to life, none of the peoples I spoken to during my fieldwork were aware of the existence of such a definition. The peoples I spoke with pointed all out to rely on physical features and upon the fluency and accent applied by speaking the Papiamentu to judge whether a person is a *yu'i Kòrsou* or not. Thereof it can be concluded that nowadays ethnicity still plays a key role in the social formation upon the island, therefore leaving tangible marks within the cultural formation upon the island as well.

### **Development possibilities for the Tambú**

Up until this point in this thesis the history, development through the years and the challenges the Tambú encounters within the Curaçao society has been addressed. Before heading to the final conclusion attention will be paid to the possibilities the Tambú has to continue its existence within the Curaçao culture and develop within the island's cultural expression. In this way this thesis might also contribute to the continuation of the Tambú in gaining more acceptance within the Curaçao society in general.

One of the ways to incorporate the Tambú more vividly into the cultural scene on the island is by applying modern features of communication to spread it out in a positive way around the island and even abroad. The foundation I mentioned earlier, Kas di Kultura, has taken advantage of the mass communication era and used the modern telecommunication system to bring about cultural communication with the Curaçao community. Hereof people are listening and reading and asking more questions about the past, they are rediscovering again what it means to be a *yu'i Kòrsou*. Due to this sudden cultural interest from the citizens the Tambú obtains a chance to actually be re-presented again to the Curaçao citizens without the negative stigma which surrounded this cultural expression through the decades. This makes the attempts to re-establish a new cultural identity for Curaçao through the Tambú more plausible because the changes can only happen in a collective atmosphere when the individual mentality shift has taken place. Such individual mentality change will be felt within the community as well making the society able to acquire a new form of collective mentality and cultural identity.

Besides applying the means available of this communication era to bring the Tambú in a positive light back into the Curaçao society it is also compulsory to integrate proper cultural and historical education back into the school programs to avoid ignorance about the own culture and

history among the growing new generation. This issue has already been addressed in this thesis thoroughly but by mentioning it again the importance of the matter is stressed upon again. Many scholars I have cited in this thesis, Bhabha (1999), Hall (2003), Marcha (2002) and Rosalia (1997), has argued the consequences of building an identity without a solid foundation to develop on. It is after all the youth of a society which carries a culture and history towards the future from their perspective. Therefore it depends on the education they receive today about their culture and history whether they will either identify themselves with it and hence carrying it towards a positive mental transformation in the future or feel shame and be reluctant to pass the culture on to the future (Hall 2003; 270). The chance existent for the youth to carry the Tambú with them to adulthood increases which also means that the sphere of negativism around the Tambú decreases. In such a way the Tambú can become a cultural symbol where every Curaçao citizen, regardless of ethnic backgrounds, feels identified with and also serves as a symbolic expression of entertainment, values and unity among the Curaçao society in general (Jarman 1998; 134).

Finally, the Curaçao society needs to make short work of prejudices based upon ethnicity in order to create a solid foundation for a collective cultural identification. This prejudice might also be the long consequences of segregation during colonialism which, together with the time of slavery, marks the basis of the island's cultural development (Lomba 2008; 151). However, if the continuation of prejudices based upon the past does not come to an end the formation of a collectivity upon the island among the different ethnic groups will remain a utopia. A method to prevent this continuation lies, again, in giving the youth proper education about their culture and history but also depends on the way the local government chooses to portray the Tambú. As long as the government keeps excluding the Tambú from official events, unfortunately something I saw occurring during the island's National Anthem and Flag Day during my fieldwork, the Tambú will continue to exist within the stigma of barbarism, obscenity and indecency. This is very ironic because while it is excluded from official cultural events on the island, everybody, with no exceptions, dances the Tambú during the *fin di aña* (at the end of the year) when it is considered acceptable to enjoy the Tambú. This mentality has to shift so that the Tambú can be acceptable during the whole year and also during official cultural events from the local government.

## Conclusion

The Curaçao society is still divided when it comes to matters of defining themselves as a culture and as a country. Whom is or who is not a *yu'i Kòrsou* from the eyes of the *yu'i Kòrsou* itself is subordinated to ethnicity; skincolour, facial features and type of hair, among others, seems to be elementary in determining whether someone is a *yu'i Kòrsou* or not. The accent the language Papiamentu is spoken with, and its fluency, is also important to define whether someone is a *yu'i Kòrsou*. Therefore it can be concluded that for the citizens of the island it is not important whether someone was born on the island or not, what does matter is appearances and use of language, the latter being the most important element to give a culture a definition and a collective cultural recognition (Hall 2003). How the Tambú stands within the Curaçao culture depends on how the cultural indifferences in matters of cultural ethnicity are dealt with in the future. As long as ethnicity is an issue the Tambú will continue to be automatically linked to only the Afro-Curaçao community instead of to the island in its entirety and as such will remain in the negative stigma as has been the case during these last decades.

There are plenty of possibilities available for the Tambú to develop in a more positive light upon the island and within the island's cultural arena. However, one problem that continues to show itself, as during this whole thesis, is the mentality issue on the island. The mentality shift can be realized by incorporating proper education about the island's own culture and history within the educational system and the local government needs to motivate such changes openly in order to give the Curaçao society a good example.

## Conclusion

I started this investigation for this thesis from the central question of how the Tambú is used as a traditional music on the island of Curaçao to construct a new ethnic identity. The Tambú is well-known on the Dutch Caribbean islands as being a traditional music from Curaçao which represents the Afro-Curaçao descendants. Also generally known is that the Tambú has been the far most persecuted form of cultural expression in the history of Curaçao. Since the beginning of slavery, through colonialism and a decolonization that still has not made way for a rather more independent structure, the Tambú had to endure repression from the dominant European ethnic group, the Catholic Church and later from the democratic elected governments. Besides these forms of repression the Afro-Curaçao community implemented a structuralized form of self-repression that became a defense mechanism in order to survive into a society mimicked from European standards. Due to the self-repression the Afro-Curaçao community embraced, their black ethnicity was constantly camouflaged with behaviours and patterns pertaining to the euro-ethnic group; this in the hope, from their point of view, to increase the black ethnicity's value.

What I found peculiar during the fieldwork was how hesitant people were in admitting in public their likes for the Tambú, even while being present at a Tambú event. This kind of behaviour shows how deep rooted the self-repression is. The Afro-Curaçao community made the mimicry of the European customs a common activity in such a way that it normalized within the community. And as a result, unlike the case in non-colonized countries, it was the ethnic group with the majority of people on the island that adapted culturally and socially (to mention a few) to the ethnic group with the minority of people on the island; meaning the 95% of the Afro-Curaçao community were up to a certain point obliged to adjust towards the way of life of the dominant 5% of the Euro-Curaçao community, classifying the Curaçao society in the same classification adopted during colonialism.

Through this colonial society's classification developed the actual society's classification; though with a lesser present ethnic barrier, yet not completely absent, which influences the division of power upon the island politically, economically, socially and culturally. As a consequence, every form of social and cultural expression that resembled a direct African heritage of link became negatively stigmatized and thus alienated from the Curaçao society in the hope for extinction or total vanish from the society.

The cultural pauperization of the Tambú is felt throughout the island in all the ethnic groups, inclusively the Afro-Curaçao ethnic group. The Tambú is still a 'delicate' matter within the society wherein people still are reluctant into admitting complete identification with the music publicly. It is a very double situation whereupon the Tambú is used outside the island, abroad, as a cultural image that represents the island and its inhabitants, whereas on the island there is an ongoing battle going on in matters of giving the Tambú a legitimate place in the island's culture. The fact that the society does not form a collective, stable group to support the Tambú makes a construction of a collective cultural and/or ethnic identity around the Tambú a rather challenging task for the island. It is not impossible though, especially if taking into consideration the cultural developments that are occurring lately on the island.

On the other hand, before this cultural identification with the Tambú becomes a fact, internal issues within the Tambú-movement need to be resolved also; that is, the split between what is seen as traditional and new in the Tambú. To accomplish a more extensive relationship between the both it is compulsory for the Tambú that the gap that emerged between the older generations and the new generation be addressed seriously and a valuable effort to unite needs to be on the agenda. For it is not only the new generation that has to carry the heavy lift of the blames, rather, the older generation needs to embrace the actual situation as well and take their responsibility in the matter. Both parties need to realize that it is not possible for music, in this case the Tambú, to remain unchanged because invented, constructed or imposed social practices can take root very quickly in music. Therefore it creates also an interchange of musical elements as the result of inevitable contact between different ethnic groups; especially now in the twenty-first century, where traditional cultural forms are being restructured as a result of the massive technological developments of nowadays (Canclini 1992).



The younger generation feels that they are not being understood by the older generation and that their work and efforts are being ridiculed, or rather, not taken seriously. These feelings come from the constant critique they receive from the society as well as from the musicians of the traditional style. Contrary to the younger generation, the older generation endeavor feelings of negligence and frustration towards the way the Tambú has and/or is developing; a development which made it lose its true meaning, what it represented and stood for, to the older generation that is. However, fear for musical hybridization is not at its place here, for innovation build on a solid (base) tradition contributes to the continuity of music style even when the changes encountered are inevitable (Manuel 2006).

From the point of view of this investigation, the opportunity of unification between the old and the young lies in finding a balance among these two points of view. Neither is wrong or right, it is more a matter of changing the approach and being open towards the cultural developments around the Tambú because changes are inevitable. If taken into consideration that music is not resistant against cultural and social developments, it becomes implausible to labor under the misapprehension that the Tambú remained unchanged, or static, through the decades (Seegers 1994). Yet, it is the believe of the older generation that it is the younger generation who changed the course of the Tambú and driven it away from its 'original' form; whereas Donny Mercelina and Morty Geertruida (informants of the older generation) pointed out themselves the changes the way of life of the Tambú, as well as the music, was undergoing in their time. It can be that because cultural and social changes are happening faster nowadays than used to be the case in the older days, due to globalization and the modern forms of communication that it might feel as though the younger generations are the ones responsible for the fast changes.

Therefore, accepting the cultural and social developments through the decades means also accepting that the Tambú is not a static element of cultural expression, but rather a dynamic one subordinated to society's alterations (Browning 1995). On the other side, the fact that the Tambú is subjected to these society's alterations means also that it is subjected to influences from abroad that arrives on the island, for, open frontiers is besides a good opportunity to propagate a musical culture abroad also an issue when it comes to resist changes that might affect traditions within this particular musical culture in a less appreciative way<sup>39</sup>. To prevent such consequences, in this case, for the Tambú, it is compulsory that the roots or basis of the Tambú are fortified in such a way whereupon changes become a positive additive instead of a fearful one.

A stronger basis for the Tambú can be accomplished by education in the own culture and history; if the younger generation, that will have to carry the Tambú to the future, receives proper education in their culture and history, the segregation in matters of cultural ethnic differences could decrease and thus increases tolerance and a more open and accepted approach towards the different forms of cultural expression on the island. In doing so, the Tambú will contribute positively in the stabilizing of the island's cultural structure as to manage a collective form of representation where all society can identify with, regardless of ethnic background. However, proper education can not and is not the only factor to be attributed to stabilize the cultural structure and thus the Tambú.

The government, for instance, has throughout the island's history contributed to ethnic and cultural segregation among the different ethnic communities on the island. Unfortunately this is still the case; cultural executive plans implemented are contradictory to each other. For example: the Ministry of Culture and Education of the island called to life a foundation which would have as target to popularize culture and bring it back to the Curaçao community. Yet, on the other hand this same Ministry withdraws the island's popular language Papiamentu out of the educational system, while it is through language, a language spoken by 95% of the population, that ethnic collectivity and cultural popularization can be accomplished (Hall 2003). As long as the government maintains this actual position, the ethnic groups, including the dominant black ethnic group, will not be given the stimulus needed; a stimulus mostly induced by a government into a society to distance the society from cultural segregation, cultural stigmatization and prejudices

---

<sup>39</sup> With 'less appreciative way' I refer to changes that might influence the traditional musical culture in such a way that certain musical styles becomes thoroughly contaminated wherein further existence becomes jeopardized or which might continue without the traditional basis that was characteristic to the particular music. In the case of traditional musical culture of Curaçao we see this pattern which caused the erosion of the musical style *Seú*, almost vanished the style called *Muzik di Zumbi* and is making the Tambú change so fast and drastically that its basis is being threatened in existence.

based upon ethnicity. Thus, collective identification will remain a myth within the island's cultural expressions.

The popularization of culture is indeed vulnerable to the government's executive plans, yet it is not the only factor responsible; each individual partaking into the island's cultural development plays a role as well. The division between the ethnic groups on the island is still present when it comes to cultural forms of expression. There is a certain them-and-us mentality which obstructs the mingling of the different ethnic groups in some cultural affairs. An example of this form of cultural segregation has been given in part four of this thesis. The reason for this cultural segregation might be found in the island's colonial history where it was common for ethnic groups to live separately from each other in a social classification based upon ethnicity. And what amplify this segregation's development with the island's culture is the lack of education available in the own history and culture, something which made each individual decide for itself how and through which means its culture was to be expressed.

It is comprehensible that the cultural segregation upon the island can not be taken away from the society's mentality and behaviour in short notice, nevertheless, the work of a foundation such as Kas di Kultura has proven to be compulsory to shift the inhabitant's mental approach towards cultural matters, matters that reflects upon the Tambú as well. The foundation aims to help the inhabitants of the island face their social issues through means of cultural and historical education for the strengthening of the island's collective ethnic identification. The inhabitants of the island, not all of them, response actively upon the foundation's activities and are seeking to find their roots and individual identity through their culture and history; not enough to create a simultaneous change yet but certainly enough to classify the actual activities on the island as a cultural movement.

This means for the Tambú a chance to exist in a more positive light for a change. The fact remains that because the changes the Tambú is undergoing nowadays goes so fast in comparison to the education the islanders received/receives about their history and customs, certain characters of the Tambú that were marked to be traditional are bound to disappear or change in such a way that it will not be recognizable anymore compared to its former state. Examples of these are the role of the *chapi* in the modern Tambú compared to the traditional one, the significance of social revolution and fight for equality that once where characteristics of the traditional Tambú and also the lyrics sung and written by the singers. This makes it nowadays a crucial time for the Tambú wherein its definite direction will be marked in the island's cultural development.

To be established as such it is crucial that the carriers of the future, the younger generations, are introduced properly to their own history and culture at school. In this way the basis of the Tambú and other traditional music has more chance to remain existent in the future as well as obtaining a more positive approach towards these cultural expressions. As all of my informants pointed out, it is impossible for the Tambú to stand still while cultural developments continues on the island but with the knowledge of the own history and culture these developments can be guided up to a point that assures an original basis in the Tambú which can remain stable for future changes in spite of outer (coming from abroad) influences.

Before the Tambú can be used as an element in the construction of a collective ethnic identity for the island, it first has to find its own place within the Curaçao culture, stabilize its roots or basis and form a collective point of start from within the Tambú (instead of traditional versus modern). Otherwise it can not stand strong and demand its place within the island's culture, let alone form a collective identity whereupon every Curaçao can identify itself with culturally. Seeing the actual developments on the island, it can be concluded that it is not an impossible task to achieve but it will take a few years to bring about this collective ethnic identity for the island of Curaçao through the Tambú.

## Bibliography

Arion, Frank Martines (2002). La Historia Lingüística y Social del Papiamentu. *Del Caribe número 39*; p. 63-74.

Béhague, Gerard H. (ed.) (1994). *Music and Black Ethnicity. The Caribbean and South America*. Florida: North-South Center Press.

Bhabha, Homi K. (1992). Freedom's Basis in the Indeterminate. *October, Vol. 61, The Identity in Question*; p. 46-57.

Bhabha, Homi K. (1984). Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse. *October, Vol. 28, Discipleship: A Special Issue on Psychoanalysis*; p. 125-133.

Bhabha, Homi K. (1985). Sly Civility. *October, Vol. 34*; p. 71-80.

Bhabha, Homi K. (1999). "The Other Question: the stereotype and colonial discourse". Evans, Jessica and Stuart Hall (ed.) *Visual Culture: The Reader*. London/California/New Delhi: SAGE Publications Ltd.; p. 371-378.

Boelbaai, Indira E. (1990). *Na Wetula Me Konopa Wetula: Na punt'e kabuya bieu ta konopa nobo*. Willemstad: Drukkerij Scherpenheuvel N.V.

Bohlman, Philip V. (1988). Traditional Music and Cultural Identity: Persistent Paradigm in the History of Ethnomusicology. *Yearbook for Traditional Music, Vol. 20*; p. 26-42.

Browning, Barbara (1995). *Samba: Resistance in motion*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press; p. 1-35.

Canclini, Nestor Garcia (1992). "Cultural Reconversion." Yudice, George & Franco, Jean & Flores, Juan (ed.) *On Edge: The crisis of contemporary Latin American Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; p. 29-45.

Christa, Gabri (2002). "Tambu: Afro-Curaçao's Music and Dance of Resistance." Sloat, Susanna (ed.). *Caribbean Dance from Abakuá to Zouk: How Music Shapes Identity*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida; p. 292-298.

Daniel, Yvonne (1995). *Rumba: Dance and social change in contemporary Cuba*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Do Rego, Charles P. (1995). *Sklabitut i Rebellion 1795*. Willemstad: MAS Productions.

Duany, Jorge (1996). Rethinking the Popular: Caribbean music and identity. *Latin American Music Review 17*, no. 2; p. 176-192.

Eckstein, Suzan (2001). "Epilogue. Where have all the movements gone? Latin American social movements at the new millennium." Suzan Eckstein (ed.). *Power and Popular Protest, Latin American Social Movements*. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press; p. 351-406.

Evans, Jessica and Stuart Hall (ed.) (1999). *Visual Culture: The Reader*. London/California/New Delhi: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Fanon, Frantz. "The Fact of Blackness". Evans, Jessica and Stuart Hall (ed.) (1999). *Visual Culture: The Reader*. London/California/New Delhi: SAGE Publications Ltd.; p. 417-420.

Finden-Crofts, Justin (1998). "Calypso's Consequences". Miller, Daniel (ed.). *Material Cultures: Why some things matter*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press; p. 147-166.

Gacitúa, Estanislao (ed.) (2001). *Social Exclusion & Poverty reduction in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

Gardiner, Harry W. & Kosmitzki, Corinne (2008). *Life Across Cultures: Cross-cultural human development*. Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.

- Glazier, Stephen (ed.) (1985). *Caribbean Ethnicity Revisited*. New York: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers.
- Gledhill, Christine (2003). "Genre and Gender: The Case of Soap Opera". Hall, Stuart (ed.). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage Publications Inc.; p. 337-386.
- Hall, Stuart (ed.) (2003). "Representation, meaning and language". *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage Publications Inc.; p. 15-74.
- Hall, Stuart (ed.) (2003). "The Spectacle of the 'Other'". *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage Publications Inc.; p. 223-290.
- Hernández, Deborah Pacini (1995). *Bachata: A social history of a Dominican popular music*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press; p. 103-153 & 225-241.
- Jarman, Neil (1998). "Material of Culture, Fabric of Identity". Miller, Daniel (ed.). *Material Cultures: Why some things matter*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press; p. 121-145.
- Koulen, Ingrid & Oostindie, Gert; with Verton, Peter and Hoefte, Rosemarijn (1987). *The Netherlands Antilles and Aruba: A Research Guide*. Dordrecht/Providence: Foris Publications.
- Lidchi, Henrietta (2003). "The Poetics and The Politics of Exhibiting Other Cultures". Hall, Stuart (ed.). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage Publications Inc.; p. 151-222.
- Lomba, Ania (2008). *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. London/New York: Routledge.
- Manuel, Peter & Bilby, Kenneth & Largey, Michael (2006). *Caribbean Currents: Caribbean music from Rumba to Reggae*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Marcha, Valdemar (2002). La Realidad Multicultural de Curazao. *Del Caribe número 39*; p. 75-83.
- Miller, Daniel (ed.) (1998). "Why Some Things Matter". *Material Cultures: Why some things matter*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press; p. 3-21.
- Morales, Donald M. (2003). The Pervasive Force of Music in African, Caribbean, and African American Drama. *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 34, no. 2; p. 145-154.
- Nettleford, Rex (1993). *Inward Stretch Outward Reach. A voice from the Caribbean*. London: Macmillan.
- Oostindie, Gert & Inge Klinkers (2003). *Decolonising the Caribbean: Dutch Policies in a Comparative Perspective*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Oostindie, Gert (1995). *Fifty Years Later: Antislavery, Capitalism and Modernity in the Dutch Orbit*. Leiden: KITLV Press.
- Pellegram, Andrea (1998). "The Message in Paper". Miller, Daniel (ed.). *Material Cultures: Why some things matter*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press; p. 103-120.
- Rosalía, Rene (Kas di Kultura) (2001). *Plan di Maneho i Akshon di Kultura: Rumbo pa Independensha Total*. Willemstad: Instituto Stripan.
- Rosalía, Rene (1997). *Represhon di Kultura: E lucha di tambú*. Willemstad: Instituto Stripan.
- Rosalía, Rene (1983). *Shon Kola, Labariano di Rasa: Mei siglo na kustia di barí*. Willemstad: Teritorio Insular Kòrsou, Sekshon Kultura.
- Rosalía, Rene (1989). *Stupi Haltu Respond'i Oro*. Willemstad: Instant Printing.
- Rosalía, Rene (1992). *Yabi Yoatina II: Mulina ta mula kaya lo bende*. Willemstad: Grupo Trinchera.

Seegers, Anthony. "Whoever We Are Today, We Can Sing You a Song about It". Béhague, Gerard H. (ed.) (1994). *Music and Black Ethnicity. The Caribbean and South America*. Florida: North-South Center Press; p.1-13.

## Discography

- Baka, O., CD: Ate wega soldachi, Oyo ku Baka i Zojojo, 2006.
- Bernadina, R., CD: Spantá nan ta, Tula i su grupo, 2004.
- Calister, I., CD: Krioyo, Izaline Calister & band, 2004.
- Engelhardt, A., CD: Yuana Yuana, Aya i su grupo, 2002.
- Gregg, D., CD: Ta mi mes ta tata ku mama, Darwin Gregg ku Zojojo i su grupo, 2003.
- Rosalía, R., CD: Dan wak'aki, Grupo Trinchera, 1982.
- Rosalía, R., Lp: Yabi Yoatina I, Trinchera, 1988.
- Rosalía, R., Lp: Yabi Yoatina II, Trinchera, 1992.
- Silvera, H., CD: Que no se pare la Rumba, Tambor Urbano, 1997.
- Stefania, M., CD: Dushi, Mistika i Grupo Zojojo, 2003.
- Susana, N., CD: Musika Krioyo di Kòrsou, Kola i su grupo di tambú, 1982.
- Susana, N., CD: Kompilashon Tambú di Kòrsou, Kola i su grupo di tambú, 1988.

## Webpage

Foundation Kas di Kultura Curaçao

[http://www.kasdikultura.an/index.php?option=com\\_docman&Itemid=62](http://www.kasdikultura.an/index.php?option=com_docman&Itemid=62) (21-01-2009)

Governmental Department of Curaçao

<http://www.curacao-gov.an/site.nsf/Sectionpages/Persberichten?OpenDocument> (21-12-2008)

Interview with the late Nicolas Susana (Shon Kola) during Festival del Caribe 2002 in Cuba

[http://www.salsasf.com/features/interviews/choncola\\_eng.html](http://www.salsasf.com/features/interviews/choncola_eng.html) (10-12-2008)

United Nations (UN), Universal Declaration of Human Rights

<http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html> (21-01-2009)