



**Kyriël van der Sloot**

# **Latino identity in a multi-ethnic Caribbean society**

**A case study in Curaçao**

**Master thesis**

**Kyriël van der Sloot**

**3138917**

**Tutor: Kees Koonings**

**Latin American and the Caribbean studies**

**University of Utrecht**

## **Abstract**

This thesis is based on anthropological research carried out in Curaçao from February until June 2010. This thesis is about Latin American immigrants in Curaçao and the way in which they define and give meaning to their identity in the host society. It elaborates upon one of the key concepts in contemporary debates on migration and globalization: *identity*. It emphasizes on the ethnic and national identity of Latinos in Curaçao, the identification of Latino immigrants with the host society and different factors influencing the process of identity formation, like feelings of home and belonging, (negative) stereotyping, discrimination, racism and state policies. The central question the thesis embraces is the following: how do Latino immigrants give form and meaning to their identity in Curaçao and what are the social conflicts - like negative stereotyping, discrimination and racism - that affect this identification? In the thesis the empirical findings of the research are analysed in relation to broader theoretical concepts and debates.

## **Resumen**

Esta tesis está basada en investigaciones antropológicas hechas en Curazao de febrero a junio del 2010. Se trata de inmigrantes latinoamericanos, su forma de definir y darle significado a la identidad en la comunidad donde viven. La tesis elabora sobre uno de los conceptos principales en los debates contemporáneos de migración y globalización: *la identidad*. Se basa en la identidad étnica y nacional de los latinos en Curasao, su identificación con la sociedad curazoleña y los factores que influyen el proceso de la formación de la identidad, como sentimientos de casa y pertenecer, estereotipias (negativas), discriminación, racismo y políticas del estado. La pregunta central que esta tesis abarca es la siguiente: ¿de qué manera los inmigrantes latinos le dan significado a su identidad en Curazao y cuáles son los conflictos sociales - como estereotipia negativa, discriminación y racismo - que afectan esta identificación? Los resultados empíricos de las investigaciones científicas realizadas se analizan en relación con más amplias discusiones de conceptos y debates teóricos.

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## **Acknowledgments**

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I really enjoyed doing research about the identity formation of Latin American immigrants in Curaçao and writing this thesis about the subject. Due to the help of many people I was able to excel my expectation. In this way I would like to thank a number of persons who made the writing of this thesis possible. Firstly, I would like to thank all my informants in Curaçao. All those Latinos and locals who were willingly to do an interview with me and gave me access into their activities and lives. Secondly, I would like to thank my host family in Curaçao, the family Maduro, for their hospitality. Thirdly, I would also like to thank my friends Vania and Lisa Ogenio in Curaçao who helped me during the research, making contacts with Latinos and locals. Fourthly, I would like to thank my tutor Kees Koonings who supervised me throughout my research in Curaçao and the writing of the thesis. I would also like to thank my friend Wei Wei, who helped me with the conceptualization of my research ideas and checked my thesis for English writing mistakes. Finally, I would like to thank my family for their support.

## Introduction

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'A Latino Venezuelan' - Raul

'A Cuban living in Curaçao' - Juanita

'I am Colombian, I was born in Colombia, but I am also Curaçaoan' - Carla

'A Latina in Curaçao' - Sandra

'Dominican, I always identify as Dominican' - Fernando

These are just some examples of the different ways in which Latin American immigrants in Curaçao identify in relation to their ethnicity, their nationality, and the host society. Moving to another country may be disconcerting for the identity of immigrants. This sudden change in the social position of people is often accompanied by a gradual change in their self-understanding, and their identity is reconstructed and redefined in the new context (Verkuyten 2005: 63). Some immigrants settle in the host society and merge into the general population. However, more often, immigrants cluster together in order to provide mutual support, to develop networks and maintain their language and their cultural characteristics and practices (Eriscksen 2002). In this thesis an analysis is provided of one of the key concepts in contemporary debates on globalization and migration: *identity*. In doing so, I will explicitly elaborate upon the case of Latino immigrants in Curaçao. The focus lays on the ethnic and national identity and the identification of Latinos with the host society.

Globalization is a complex process that has intensified over the last decades; it refers to the intensification of the mobility and interconnectedness of the world. Innovations in technology and communication have made it easier and quicker for people and things to move around, creating the feeling that the world is shrinking, putting time and space into a new perspective (Castles 2000; Castles & Miller 2003; Inda & Rosaldo 2002). The process of globalization has important effects on personal as well as group identities; as it puts people in contact with growing numbers of new 'others' (Larrain 2000: 36-40). International migration can be seen as a key feature within the globalization process. People increasingly move around and cultural products and practices change, making it difficult to draw clear lines between cultural distinct places. However, this does not mean that 'place' becomes irrelevant; immigrants often use the memory of a place to construct communities. The imagination of the 'homeland' is a powerful symbol for unity among immigrants (Inda & Rosaldo 2002; Gupta & Ferguson 2002: 68-69).

Migration is not a new phenomenon, but in the past decades international migration has rapidly increased in volume and significance. In the twenty-first century states around the world, as immigrant sending, receiving, or both, are increasingly affected by migration flows influencing economic, social and cultural structures and state policies (Castles & Miller 2003; Chryssochoou 2004). Immigration as well as emigration have been characterizing aspects of the Caribbean region for a long time, and it is likely that they will continue to be so in the future. The legacies of colonial times and the mass migration of Europeans, African slaves, laborers from Asia, and others, has resulted in a great diversity of ethnicities in the Caribbean; and because of the arrival of new immigrants, cultural and ethnic diversity in the region is becoming even greater (Boswell 2003; Castles & Miller 2003; Conway 2003). Curaçao is a small island in the Caribbean, well known for its diversity in ethnicities and nationalities (Oostindie 2006). Curaçao is an immigrant sending as well as an immigrant receiving society (see appendix 1, table I). The relative economic prosperity Curaçao experiences comparing to other Latin America countries has attracted large and growing numbers of Latin American immigrants to the island. After the Dutch, the Latinos are the largest immigrant group in Curaçao. The major origin countries include the Dominican Republic, Colombia, and Venezuela; others come from Cuba, Peru, Puerto Rico, etcetera (see appendix 1: table II, table III and table IV).

These immigration flows have important impacts on the lives of immigrants and their families but also on the receiving society. In the new society these immigrants might encounter problems such as negative stereotypes, discrimination and exclusion, influencing the way in which they adapt to the host society. The question that emerges is: how do Latino immigrants give form and meaning to their identity in Curaçao and what are the social conflicts - like negative stereotyping, discrimination and racism - that affect this identification? This is the central question on which this thesis is based. In order to answer this question, I did anthropological fieldwork in Curaçao; from February until June 2010. Scientific research on Latin American immigrants in Curaçao was not done before. Therefore, this thesis shows new findings and insights into contemporary debates on identity formation. This thesis elaborates upon ethnic and national identity and the integration of immigrants into the new society. Hence, it is scientifically as well as socially and politically relevant. For the clarity of the coming chapters, I will turn now to the discussion of the concept identity. I will also discuss the research context elaborating upon the ethnic diversity in Curaçao. Furthermore, I will discuss the research methods and the research group.

## **Identity constructions**

When people move to a new country their lives change. In the new society they become a minority group and differences between groups become clearer, making it necessary for immigrants to redefine, renegotiate and reconstruct their identity (Ghorashi 2001; WRR 2007). Identity is formed on a personal and a collective level, mutually intertwined. It is not only an individual experience but also a group experience as it is formed due to the identification of the self in relation to others. People are classifying beings, creating order on symbolic and social levels. In order to define one's own group, people accentuate the differences with others. From this differentiation the idea of 'us' and 'them' emerges. Identifications with a group serve as a way for people to obtain certain goals, self-confidence, status and respect, and feelings of belonging and togetherness (Ericksen 2002; WRR 2007: 50-53).

In the conceptualization of identity a distinction can be made between two main theoretical discourses: essentialism and constructionism. When identity is approached in an essentialist way, identity is seen as something that is static, consistent and fixed; it is something a person has that does not change. Opposed to this essentialist way of thinking, contemporary discourses of identity are mainly approached in a constructionist way. According to this view identity is a social construct, it is a dynamic and layered concept; a construction of the self that is always changing and the relevance of certain identities depends on the context. In this thesis I approach identity in a constructionist way. However, I will also show that there are some restrictions to the construction and changeability of identity. People have multiple identities, not all chosen but also ascribed by others and past events and broader historical circumstances influence the construction of identity. (Ericksen 2002; Ghorashi 2001; Larrain 2000: 37-39; Verkuyten 2005).

Verkuyten (2005) argues that identity is a layered and complex concept. He analyses the social identity of people. By social identity Verkuyten (2005: 42-44) refers to the relationship of the individual and the environment. The concept indicates how people are socially defined in categories, such as gender, age, ethnicity and nationality. Social identity is what people have in common with each other and what makes them different from others. An analytical distinction can be made between three components of social identity. Firstly, the sociostructural component can be defined; this component refers to the social classification of people into socially relevant group categories. Secondly, there is a cultural component to social identity. This component refers to the manifestations of behavior of a group, for

example the expressions of dance and music of a certain ethnic group. The cultural component gives categories its social meaning in practice and over time. A label alone is not enough; the label also needs to have a meaning. The third component is the ontological definition of identity. This component refers to the judgment that goes together with the categories in which people are placed (Verkuyten 2005: 42-48). In this thesis I elaborate upon these different components of the social identity of people, as I analyze the ethnic and national identity of Latinos in Curaçao as well as their identification with the host society and the way in which they are perceived by the local community.

### **Curaçao's ethnic diversity: past and present**

Curaçao was colonized by the Dutch and for a long time it has been part of the Dutch Antilles which incorporated five-islands as an autonomous country within the Dutch Kingdom. Recently, Curaçao - like Aruba has done before - is going through a process of constitutional change; it is going to become a separate country within the Dutch Kingdom (Allen 2009; Goede 2008; Oostindie 2000: 221). By the time the Dutch arrived in Curaçao, there was no large number of Indians and immigration became the way to populate the island. Curaçao did not have a plantation system like many other Caribbean countries did. There were some plantations on which African slaves worked, but the economy was primarily orientated towards international (slave) trade. During colonial times, the population of Curaçao was composed out of three groups of considerable scope: the white, the free colored and blacks, and the slaves (Oostindie 2000: 56). The population of Curaçao mixed already during slavery. Even though, society was still divided according to the classical color-line: white-colored-black; with on one hand the perceived superiority of whites, on the other hand, the perceived inferiority of free colored and blacks, and slaves (Oostindie 2000).

From the 1930s onwards, Curaçao experienced an influx in immigration of people from other Caribbean islands, Latin America and Europe. The establishment and expansion of the oil refinery stimulated the immigration influx of many labor migrants settling in Curaçao. However, in the 1950s the economy of Curaçao declined and many immigrants returned to their home countries. Due to the worsening of the economic situation at the end of the twentieth century, many people in Curaçao decided to migrate to the Netherlands, a trend that continues to the present day. The situation however did not discourage the flows of immigrants to Curaçao. In recent years, an increased number of immigrants from the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, Venezuela and Colombia arrived in Curaçao in search of

employment, adding to a greater ethnic and cultural diversity on the island (see appendix 1: Table II). As long as the economic situation in Curaçao is better than the situation in surrounding countries, the flows of migration can be expected to continue (Allen 2006; Allen 2009; Goede 2008; Sharpe 2005).

### **Research methodology**

During my fieldwork in Curaçao I used several complementary qualitative research methods: open interviews, participant observation, informal conversations, desk research and focus group. Open interviews with a topic list was the main research method. The research findings are based on more than fifty in-depth interviews with Latinos as well as locals.<sup>1</sup> I also did some life history interviews and a few more structured interviews with policy related people. Participant observation was also an important research method. I did participant observation during daily activities of my informants such as joining them for dinner, a trip to the beach, a night out, etcetera. I also did participant observation during festivities, social and cultural activities, religious gatherings, and more.

During my research I used informal conversations as a method too. This was useful to get a general view of the research population and interesting topics, to gain the trust of my informants and arrange interview appointments. Desk research was also used as a research method. I read the local newspapers to get a general view of the representation of Latinos in the media. I also did desk research in order to obtain statistics related to Latin American immigrants in Curaçao (see appendix 1). Finally, I also used the focus group as a research method. I was able to organize one focus group at the end of my fieldwork time. The group, which included ten people, was composed by Latinos from different countries of origin and one local. The main research topics were discussed during the focus group (ethnic identity, national identity, the integration of Latinos in Curaçao and discrimination).

### **Research group**

The major sending countries of Latino immigrants in Curaçao, the Dominican Republic, Colombia and Venezuela and also smaller groups of Latinos, like people from Peru and Cuba, are included in the research group. The research group is composed by men as well as women, from different socio-economic classes. All of the interviewed Latinos are legal

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<sup>1</sup> To guarantee the anonymity of my informants I have used pseudonyms for their names.

residents and some are naturalized Dutch.<sup>2</sup> The reasons why they migrated to Curaçao are generally better opportunities in employment, marriage to locals and political tensions in their countries of origin. The reason to choose Curaçao above other destination countries is often the presence of family members or friends already on the island. The proximity of the island and no visa requirements are also reasons for Latinos to migrate to Curaçao. The last reason however has changed over time, as in the present there is a visa requirement for Colombians and Dominicans because of illegal immigrants and drug trafficking and criminality. For a more explicit description of the Latinos I interviewed see appendix 2.

Locals were also included in the research groups. The way in which immigrants are perceived by mainstream society has important effects on how immigrants define their identity. Therefore it was important for this research to include the view that locals have of Latino immigrants. The locals I interviewed in Curaçao are varied: those with anthropological knowledge, with knowledge about education, and those with knowledge about culture, gender, and history. But I also interviewed locals with no specific knowledge about the research subjects but who came in contact with Latino immigrants. Furthermore, I also included people related to policy into my research group because the state also plays an important role in the way in which immigrants are treated in the host society. A more explicit description of the locals I interviewed is also given in appendix 2.

### **Structure of the thesis**

The different chapters of this thesis are based on empirical research findings as well as the broader theoretical concepts and discussions in which my empirical findings can be placed. In the different chapters I elaborate upon the theoretical and conceptual discussions that provide the framework for the interpretation of my empirical findings. I connect the analysis of relevant research findings to these theoretical concepts and debates. The empirical research findings are illustrated by means of quotations and additional text boxes in which specific topics are illustrated.<sup>3</sup>

In chapter 1, I discuss ethnic identity. This chapter elaborates upon the construction of a Latino ethnic identity. The cultural components of the ethnic identity, the expression of the Latino identity and the ethnic networks that have emerged in Curaçao are discussed. Chapter

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<sup>2</sup> I restricted my research group to legal Latino immigrants because illegal ones were difficult to reach given the time constraints of my research.

<sup>3</sup> All quotations are translated by the author.

2 elaborates upon the national identity of Latino immigrants in Curaçao. It discusses the construction of national identity, the cultural components of the national identity of Latinos, the organization of Latinos in Curaçao through national lines and transnational practices. In chapter 3, I show the way in which Latinos in Curaçao adapt to the host society elaborating upon how they identify with Curaçao and the influence of feelings of home and belonging on the construction of identity. Chapter 4 provides an illustration of how Latinos are perceived by the host society. Stereotyping, discrimination, racism and state policies in relation to the identity formation of Latinos in Curaçao are discussed in this chapter. In my conclusion I will discuss the interconnectedness of identity in relation to the main theoretical concepts and empirical findings and I will answer the central research questions.

## 1. The ethnic identity of Latin American immigrants in Curaçao

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'In fact the differences between the Latin Americans, in what I have noticed in the time I am living in foreign countries, are very few. Perhaps in subjects like lexicon, expressions, how we name an object, a food, it can vary a little, but basically the customs are the same; the customs, the values, the way in which things are done. Of course everyone says: this is done like this in Colombia, this is done like this in Santo Domingo, this is done like this in Venezuela, different for every country. But when you unite us all in the same place we are basically the same. The realities of our countries are quite alike, very similar, not to say exactly the same, but very similar', so Miguel an immigrant from Venezuela commented during my interview with him.

One of the key questions Larrain (2000: 1) brings to the fore is whether it is possible to speak of a Latin American identity. According to my research findings, as illustrated by the quote given above, the answer to this question is yes we can speak of a Latino identity among Latin American immigrants in Curaçao. As I will explain in this chapter, this Latino identity can be considered ethnic. But before turning to the discussion of why and how Latinos in Curaçao identify ethnically, it is important to define what ethnicity actually means.

In anthropological debates a common distinction often made is between the 'primordialist' and the 'instrumentalist' approaches to ethnicity. The primordialist approach, elaborated upon by scholars such as Clifford Geertz and Max Weber, sees ethnicity as something the person has, it is static and it does not change. This way of thinking has been criticized because ethnicity is not something that does not change, ethnic identities overlap with other identities, such as gender and religion, and its importance may change in different situations and over time (Hutchinson & Smith 1996). Opposed to the primordialist thinking, ethnicity can also be approached in an instrumentalist way, as done by scholar such as Abner Cohen and Michael Hechter. The instrumentalist approach sees ethnicity as a resource for people to obtain certain (political) goals. Ethnicity is seen as an instrument that can be used in the competition for resources. Yet, this approach is also criticized as it undermines the symbolic and meaning given aspect of ethnic identity (Ericksen 2002; Hutchinson & Smith 1996).

Fredrik Barth also played an important role in the conceptualization of ethnicity. Barth's thinking implies that ethnic groups are not defined by the cultural contents of the group but by the social boundaries that emerge in relation to other groups. The boundaries and the symbolic 'border guards' such as language, food and clothing, ensure the persistence of an ethnic group. The boundaries are permeable and transactions across these boundaries reinforce them. But Barth has also been criticized for assuming the fixity of ethnic groups (Hutchison &

Smith 1996: 9-10). Whether Barth is a primordialist thinker or not is debatable. According to Ericksen (2002: 54) Barth is often described as an instrumentalist thinker rather than a primordialist one.

Although there is disagreement in the way ethnicity should be approached, the different approaches seem to agree on the fact that ethnicity is related to the social organization and classification of people. For the clarity of this thesis I will use the following definition of ethnicity given by Ericksen (2002: 12): 'ethnicity is an aspect of social relationships between agents who consider themselves as culturally distinctive from members of other groups with whom they have a minimum of interaction'. What the cultural commonality is of an ethnic group is not always easy to define, but it is often based on ideas of common origin, history, phenotypical appearances, language, religion, costumes, traditions, experiences and values (Castles & Miller 2003: 33; Ericksen 2002; Hutchison & Smith 1996).

### **1.1 Defining group boundaries: 'us' and 'them'**

Ethnic classifications are social and cultural products that order people into categories of relevant others and are made when these classifications seem socially relevant, for instance when interaction takes place between members of different ethnic groups. Ethnicity leads to the identification of people with a certain group, but it also involves exclusion by other (Castles & Miller 2003). According to Ericksen (2002: 11-12) ethnic boundaries are social boundaries which do not isolate groups, rather are constructed due to the interaction between groups. By migrating to Curaçao, Latin American immigrants come into contact and interact with the local population and with other (Latin American) immigrants, bringing to the fore the ethnic identity of these Latino immigrants. As I will illustrate below, my Latino informants see themselves as culturally different from the local population and as culturally similar to other Latin American immigrants. They do not only see themselves as culturally different but are also perceived to be so by the locals. Due to the interaction between these groups, an in-group and an out-group is created, 'us' and 'them', Latinos and locals.

Daniel is an immigrant from Cuba who strongly identifies as being a Latino in Curaçao; when I asked him how it was for him to meet other Latinos from different nationalities, he answered as follows:

'When we meet a Dominican, a Colombian, a Venezuelan, when we talk, when we express ourselves, we feel we have something in common (...) the way we live, the way we project ourselves'.

Emilia, an immigrant from Venezuela, told me:

‘We Latinos are like this, we are spontaneous, we are happy, we say the things we think, we just say them’.

This aspect of being a Latino was expressed by many of my Latino informants in Curaçao, they feel they are Latinos in the way they are, the way they treat people; they are kind, they are friendly, they like to share and they are expressive. The locals are perceived to be different, they are perceived to be more formal, closed, serious and distant in their relationships with others.

The Spanish language is an important aspect of the ethnic identity of the Latinos in Curaçao. Although many of my Latino informants also speak the local language Papiamentu and often communicate with the local population in Papiamentu, they feel a strong identification with the Latino group because of the Spanish language. Within their own group they prefer to speak Spanish because they can express themselves better in their own language. The local population also identifies the Latinos as a different group because they speak Spanish. Although many locals also speak the Spanish language to a certain extent, it is perceived to be an aspect of the Latino identity. What’s more, most of my Latino informants have an accent while speaking Papiamentu and because of that the local population can easily identify them as Latinos. As Delia from the Dominican Republic told me:

‘My accent is a bit different; they always identify me because of that: “are you Latina? And from where, Dominican Republic?” they always identify me because of that’.

Speaking the Spanish language creates a sense of group belonging and feelings of togetherness between the Latinos in Curaçao as well as boundaries with other groups. The importance of the Spanish language as a component of the Latino identity is well illustrated by the following quotation:

‘The Latinos are culturally similar to one another; there are not so many differences. One of the things that help this identification is the language (...) When you meet somebody who speaks Spanish, especially if you do not understand the local language at the beginning, then when you hear somebody that speaks Spanish you start a friendship with that person’, so Gustavo, an immigrant from Colombia, told me during my interview with him.

Music, food, and clothing are cultural characteristics shared by the Latinos in Curaçao and therefore become important aspects of their ethnic identity. The salsa, the merengue, and the bachata are known as the music styles of the Latinos. Many of my Latino informants mentioned music as an important aspect of being a Latino. The Latino music is an aspect of the ethnic identity of my Latino informants that is not only self-ascribed but also ascribed to them by the local population. Although there is a large influence of Latin music in Curaçao and it is widely heard on the island in shops, restaurants, bars, etcetera, it is still an aspect of the ethnic identity of the Latinos, it is part of the Latino culture; a cultural aspect that has been integrated in the local community in Curaçao but that is still seen by the local population as a cultural aspect of a different ethnic group. Food is also an aspect of the Latino ethnic identity. According to my Latino informants, the food of the Latinos is very similar; the ingredients are similar such as rice and meat, and they say they eat healthier than the local population, with less fat.

Clothing is another characteristic of the ethnic identity. Some of my Latino informants argue they dress simpler than the local population. They do not use outstanding colors like the local population does and they can be recognized in that way. It is for example more likely to see a Latino with jeans and a grey t-shirt than with a yellow pants and a red t-shirt. The locals also recognize the Latinos because of their clothing. Leila and Vivian (locals) for example say that the Latinas generally wear shorter skirts and lower décolleté, in other words, they dress sexier than the local women. The local population can also identify the Latinos by their phenotypical appearances. The Latinos often have straighter hair and a lighter skin color than the local population.

According to Castles and Miller (2003: 33), a sense of belonging to an ethnic group is also based on ideas of shared values. My Latino informants expressed this feature of their ethnic identity referring to values such as the importance of the family and the importance to work hard in order to progress in life. Daniel from Cuba for example argues the following:

‘I think the Latino is a person more oriented towards the family. The Curaçaoan is more oriented to the social part, to society, outside the home, work, less oriented towards the family than the Latino’.

When I asked Sandra from the Dominican Republic what it means for her to be a Latina she told me the following:

‘The culture, your roots which you take with you wherever you go, the food, helping each other, and work. I teach my children they have to work; the children here are a bit lazy’.

Many of my Latino informants say just like Sandra that Latinos are aware of the importance to work hard in order to progress in life, while the locals are often perceived to be lazier. The locals I have talked with also typify the Latinos as a group that is hardworking and highly committed to their work. My local informants see this as a result of the necessity the Latinos experience in the new country as they find themselves in a disadvantage position as foreigners in Curaçao. For the locals this aspect does not only apply to the Latinos, but to all immigrant groups.

The ethnic identity of the Latinos in Curaçao is created in relation to the ‘other’. For the Latinos, the ‘other’ in Curaçao is mainly the local population. Yet, the locals are not the only ones. The Dutch are the largest immigrant group in Curaçao. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Dutch are also addressed as being culturally different by some of my Latino informants. It is argued by my Latino informants for instance that the Dutch are punctual, while the Latinos are not. Another difference between both groups that some of my Latino informants bring to the fore is that the Latinos are people who like to share with their families and friends, while the Dutch seldom make time for it.

## **1.2 Expressing the Latino identity and the importance of ethnic networks**

Ethnic identity can be a resource for individuals acting as a group to gain socio-economic mobility, status and respect (Baud et al. 1996, Ericksen 2002). Through the expression of the ethnic identity in Curaçao in a variety of ways, Latinos get to know each other and ethnic networks of support emerge. The Latino identity is expressed in clubs, bars, concerts and parties which are well known for the presence of the Latino immigrants enjoying the rhythms of Latin music and the Latino ambiance. As I was told by Santiago, an immigrant from the Dominican Republic:

‘Where there is a Latino party there are always large groups of people, because they say it is a nice environment, that if you go to a local party you are not going to feel the same environment as at a Latino party, because the locals are always sitting, waiting for what is going to happen, the Latinos do not sit, they create the ambiance, they move, they dance, they share, but the locals do not’.

During these social gatherings Latinos get to know other members of their ethnic group. Mutual support is provided between Latinos in Curaçao who know each other. They provide help in for example finding employment, residence, and in legal issues. During the focus group I held with different Latino guests, Edward, an immigrant from Venezuela, gave the example of one of the restaurants where he used to work:

‘There are only Latinos working in the kitchen because they all help each other in finding a job’, so he said.

The ethnic identity of Latinos in Curaçao is also expressed through religion. There are several churches in Curaçao where Spanish is spoken and predominantly Latin American immigrants assist. Through these churches ethnic networks emerge through which mutual support is provided. Pastor Gustavo is a Colombian pastor at an Evangelic church in Curaçao; he argues that many Latinos come to his church because there they can find support within their ethnic group. In the neighborhood Santa Maria there is a ‘*Habla Hispano*’ Adventist church (see text box 1). This church was created by a small group of Latin American immigrants who saw the need for a Latino Adventist church because not everybody understands and speaks Papiamentu. By now the group is large and they have two gathering locations. Through this church a strong group sense of being Latinos has emerged and ethnic networks serve as networks of support. Furthermore, there are also Catholic and Jehovah churches in Curaçao where the ceremonies are held in Spanish and many Latinos assist. So, through the churches social networks emerge between Latinos. Yet, these social networks are also restricted, as the group is not only an ethnic but also a religious one. Latinos who are not religious do not have access to these ethnic networks.

However, religion does not always draw the lines between the locals and the Latinos. People in Curaçao are also very religious and there are many churches on the island of different religions. Most of my Latino informants are catholic and assist a local catholic church where the ceremonies are held in Papiamentu and mostly locals assist. The reason they give is that the Latino churches are far away and the ceremonies are early in the morning, so they prefer to go to the neighborhood church. Besides, most of my Latino informants understand Papiamentu so language is not an obstacle for them. Thus, the ethnic identity is expressed through religion and ethnic networks emerge among Latinos who go to the same church. But religion is also a common ground between the Latinos and the locals and may bring religious identification to the fore making ethnic identification less relevant. Lorena

**Text box 1: Participant observation at the Latino Adventist church**

On Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> of March, Leila (local) picked me up around 8 am to go to the Latino Adventist church in Curacao. We were invited by Daniel, an immigrant from Cuba. The church is located in the neighborhood Santa Maria. We were welcomed to the church very friendly. There were quite some people present but the church was not full. Besides us, the people present were Latin American immigrants. The church service started with several people talking about god and about the activities they are organizing to help building Adventist churches in African countries. Later on there was a bible class. Elisa, an immigrants from Venezuela, gave us 'the visitors group' the bible class. After the bible class, a lady presented a song to god, some more people made their speeches and then the priest preached. It was interesting that a local priest was invited to preach. He preached in Papiamentu. He referred to the church a couple of times as the '*Habla Hispano*' church; he said that this was a church of Latinos but in the eyes of god everybody is equal. After the church services everybody went outside and stayed there for a while to chat, in Spanish of course.

When I spoke with Daniel as well as Adriano, who both assist to this church, it became clear that they strongly identify with this particular church because it is a Latino church. Adriano answered as follows when I asked him why he chooses to go to this specific church: 'In the first place I could not speak well the language from here, Papiamentu. Another reason is because of the comradeship you obtain with the Latinos. We are very different, the Latino culture is very different from the ones here, the Latinos always like to be in a group, sharing, doing activities together, and even more if it is of the church. It is something that has to do much with the culture, the Latino culture has to do much in that. For example, nearby where I live there is an Adventist church, but I come all the way from Santa Rosa to Santa Maria because of the '*Habla Hispano*' church, they are my people, my friends are there, it is more fun for me', so Adriano told me.

form Puerto Rico for instance goes to a local Adventist church. She told me that the cultural differences between her and locals become less relevant in her religious group because they share the same religious believes. The relevance of the ethnic identity diminishes when she is with her religious group.

The Latino identity is also expressed in the media. Two newspapers in Spanish exist: '*El Periodico*' and '*La Brújula*' which are predominantly directed towards the Latino community in Curaçao. José Miguel, an immigrant from Cuba, is one of the founders of both newspapers. According to him the newspapers were initiated because there was a need for information in Spanish, there is a large group of Latinos in Curaçao who do not read Papiamentu or just prefer to read in Spanish. Both newspapers inform about important issues related to the Latino immigrants in Curaçao such as how to obtain a work permit, how to obtain a residence permit, and how the naturalization process works. The newspapers also report on subjects of human interest, such as local and international news. The people working at the newspapers are Latino

immigrants from different countries of origin and ethnic networks emerge due to the newspapers. The importance of the newspapers to inform people about the Latino community was argued by Juanita, an immigrant from Cuba. She told me she always reads the newspaper '*La Brújula*' because in that way she stays informed about the things that concern the Latino community in Curaçao. She is a teacher and has several Latinos students. By reading the newspaper Juanita stays up to date about the environment in which her Latino students live, so she told me.

There is also a radio station in Spanish, '*Rumbera Network*', in which predominantly Latin music is played. Furthermore there is a journal '*Guia Latina*' directed towards the Latino immigrants in Curaçao, but this journal is not published at the moment because of money reasons. The television program '*Lideres Unidos*', directed by Geronimo from the Dominican Republic, is also predominantly orientated towards the Latino community in Curaçao. Every Saturday an interview is send out during the program with mostly a Latino guest. In addition, sport news is also presented in Spanish. The program can be watch live on television but also on the internet. Through this program ethnic networks have also emerge as people get to know more Latinos living on the island.

Furthermore an organization of Latinas in Curaçao is emerging at the moment. The organization is called '*Club de Damas Hispanas*'. According to Rosita, an immigrant from Colombia and one of the founding members of the organization, the members of the organization are mostly women because they have more time for this type of activities, while men assist to the organized activities and sponsor the organization. Their main goal is to organize activities to gather money for social community work. In September for instance they have planned to organize a Latino party in order to collect money. Furthermore the organization is also meant to be a place for social gathering. Although the members of the organization are mainly Latinas, it is not restricted to the ethnic group. All people who speak Spanish are welcome, so Rosita told me.

Furthermore, Jimmy from Colombia, has the idea to establish an organization for Latinos, to provide support for the ethnic group and economic improvement for its members. But he argues that it is very difficult to found such an organization because there is too little unity and mutual support between the Latinos in Curaçao because they only care about their own economic improvement. According to Jimmy, the Latinos in Curaçao often find themselves in a bad socio-economic position but do not provide mutual support in order to gain socio-economic mobility, they do not see the strength of acting as a group.

‘When there is a party they all are Latinos and they all go, but when they have to help each other they look the other way’, so Jimmy says.

But Latino ethnic networks of support have emerged in Curaçao; therefore the reason why Jimmy has not yet succeeded in founding the organization for Latinos is more likely a problem of organization rather than a problem of unity between Latinos.

Ethnic networks have also emerged at the universities. At the University of Netherlands Antilles, the UNA, group forming between Latinos takes place. According to Santiago from the Dominican Republic, who studies Spanish at this University, the Latinos gather at the University to share and help one another. At the Caribbean International University in Curaçao, group forming also takes place between Latinos from different countries of origin and ethnic networks emerge. The classes in this university are given in Spanish and therefore the Latinos are the ones who mostly go to this University, so Pedro from Venezuela who studies at this University told me.

### **1.3 Ethnic identity in the diaspora**

When Latinos migrate to Curaçao they come into contact with other Latin American immigrants from different nationalities. Many of my Latino informants told me they did not know so many people from different Latin American countries before migrating to Curaçao. According to Larrain (2000: 1-4) a Latin American identity always existed in the Latin American region, which stems from a shared history of colonization, the Independence wars in which people from different Latin American countries fought together, the shared language, religion, and many others cultural similarities. The different nation-states make part of a larger cultural area that is Latin America. The existence of this Latin American identity is shown in social science, novelists, poetry, music, etcetera. ‘Latino’ can therefore be shaped into an ethnic identity in Latin American diasporas. An ethnic identity that encompasses more than one nation-state and can therefore be argued to be transnational.

Not only in Curaçao but also in the United States we can speak of an ethnic group of Latinos. In the United States ‘Latino’ or ‘Hispanic’ is recognized as an ethnic category in governmental agencies and scholar’s writings. The difference between Curaçao and the United States is that the Latino immigrants in the United States enter an environment in which racial and ethnic divisions are strict. In Curaçao racial and ethnic divisions are more open and dynamic (Portes & Truelove 1987: 359; Sanabria 2007: 141). How Latino immigrants see the

Latino group in Curaçao is clearly illustrated by Daniel from Cuba, as he explained to me that:

'Looking at it globally, Latino is our big country, Cuba, Venezuela, Colombia are our neighborhoods. We are from a big country with different neighborhoods; we have similarities particular to a big country and we have differences particular to our neighborhoods. It is true that there is a lot of identification as Latinos, but there are also many differences (...) but those differences are not irreconcilable. The differences enrich our culture. The five fingers belong to the same hand but they are not equal'.

This quotation illustrates that Latin American immigrants in Curaçao identify as a group of Latinos in general, but within that Latino group they identify with their national groups in particular.

To conclude, the ethnic identity of Latin American immigrants in Curaçao is based on ideas of common origin, cultural similarities, values, and the Spanish language. The ethnic identity is not only self-ascribed but also ascribed to them by the local population. This ethnic identity is reflected in the host society in social and religious activities and gatherings, in the media and through the organization of Latinas, enabling ethnic networks to emerge. The ethnic identity becomes strong in the diaspora where many Latinos from different countries of origin meet and interact and became aware of the similarities between them. Yet, this does not mean that within the Latino group differences are not made between national groups. How the national identities of my Latino informants are given form and meaning in the new society is the subject of the next chapter.

## 2. The National identity of Latin American immigrants in Curaçao

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By moving to a new country Latin American immigrants become a minority group, leading to the renegotiation and reevaluation of their national identity in the new society. My research findings show that Latin American immigrants in Curaçao strongly identify with their country of origin. In the previous chapter I discussed the importance of the ethnic identity for Latino immigrants in Curaçao. This ethnic identity of Latinos in Curaçao is articulated alongside their national identity. When I asked Raul for example, an immigrant from Venezuela, about his origin he answered as follows:

‘Venezuela. Latino in part, I cannot deny we are part of what are the Latin Americans, who speak Spanish. But in the present I consider a Latino those who are taken to be ‘Latin lovers’. No, I am Venezuelan, a Latino Venezuelan’, so he said.

This quotation is illustrative to show the strong national identification Latin American immigrants in Curaçao generally have. To distance himself from the perceived bad reputation of Latinos, Raul from Venezuela puts more emphasize on his national identity. All the Latin American immigrants I interviewed in Curaçao say to identify nationally. But what does it mean for Latin American immigrants in Curaçao to identify nationally? And how do Latinos give form and meaning to this national identity in the new society? In order to answer these questions I will turn now to the discussion of the construction of national identity, the cultural aspects that my Latino informants address as important elements of their national identity, the way in which Latin American immigrants in Curaçao are organized and the transnational practices in which they engage.

### 2.1 The construction of a national identity

Ghorashi (2001) argues that the identity of people is not only changeable, flexible and negotiated, but also has some continuity with the past. The past forms people’s references which influence the identification process in the present. These frames of reference that my Latino informants acquired over time in their countries of origin influence their national identity in the present day in Curaçao. In their countries of origin the Latino immigrants learned to love and respect their countries and to honor their national symbols. This national identity is something they have acquired already from their childhood onwards and is a frame

of reference for their identity that does not disappear in a new country but is revalued and renegotiated.

Adriano, an immigrant from Peru, told me during my interview with him that he learned to love his country during military service:

‘I love my country, I love my country because in the year ’93 when I was sixteen years old, in that time the military service was obligated in my country and I had to inscribe myself in the civic register to obtain my identification, so they took me to serve my country. While serving my country (...) I started caring about my country because you are willing to die for your country, for your fatherland, I think that taught me that my fatherland has great value for me’, so Adriano told me.

This quote illustrates that the nation-state demands and achieves a certain degree of commitment of its members, illustrated for example by those people who are prepared to die for their nation-state (Anderson 2006; Larrain 2000: 34). But why do people feel such a commitment towards their nation-state and why are people prepared to die for it? Benedict Anderson (2006) answers these questions by arguing that nation-state are ‘imagined communities’.

According to Anderson (2006: 5-6) nation-states are ‘imagined political communities’ in which an ideology of a shared community is constructed. It is imagined because people of the nation-state feel connected with each other without the need to interact on a personal level. The symbolic existence of the nation has been an important source for the identity formation of the people who belong to this ‘imagined political community’, as strong feelings of togetherness and similarity have emerged among members of the same nation-state. Boundaries are drawn between those who belong to the nation-states and those who do not. These physical and symbolic boundaries define the entitlement to resources in the nation-state (Crysochoou 2004: 101).

In defining what a nation-state is, two approaches have emerged. The first approach is a civic conceptualization of the nation; it is argued that the nation is characterized by common interests, rights, and duties. The second approach is linked to an ethnic conceptualization of the nation; it is argued that the basis for a nation lies on common culture and heritage. The nation is dominated by one ethnic group whose identity and interests are representative for the nation. In both approaches the nation is linked to a political organization: the state. In many cases, the civic and ethnic conceptualizations of the nation have come together in the

conceptualization of the nation-state (Chrysochoou 2004: 100; Ericksen 2002: 100-119, Smith 1986: 130-152). Indeed, according to Gellner (1983: 1) nationalism as a political principle emphasizes that cultural boundaries should go together with political and territorial boundaries of the nation-state. The state and elites aspirations to give a cultural content to the civic nation-state can lead to them relying on a core ethnic construct. In multicultural civic nations a certain ethnic group can seek to maximize its interests and influence in the nation-state, as for example has been the case for the English speaking whites in the United States (Smith 1986: 129).

To understand the significance of the national identity for my Latino informants in Curaçao it is important to see how national identities were created in Latin American nation-states over time. After a long history of colonization by the European powers Spain and Portugal, a struggle for Independence started in Latin America in the nineteenth century. During the eighteenth century, the economic power of Spain and Portugal started to decline, resulting in the implementation of restrictions in the colonies. These restrictions were opposed to the interest of local elites (Larrain 2000: 70; Lynch 1987). What the colonizers thought as rational development, the local elites thought it as an attack on their interests and the colonizers became an obstacle to the growth of the colonies (Lynch 1987: 7-19). The elites in Latin America influenced by enlightenment ideas soon started the struggles for independence (Anderson 1991: 49- 52). After the wars of independence in Latin American the question emerged what the components were going to be of the national identity of the newly established republics. The elites in Latin America used their power and access to the state in order to play an important role in what was going to be included in the national identity and what not (Larrain 2000: 9).

In the nineteenth century, European conceptualization of the nation-states were based on territorial sovereignty. Latin American elites relied on this prevalent model (Smith 1986: 129-152). Furthermore, a great ethnic diversity lays at the basis of Latin American societies. Therefore, it can be argued that the civic conceptualization of the nation-state lies at the basis for the unity that was created in Latin American countries. As argued by Anderson (2006: 47) the creoles elites in Latin America were not so different from the colonizers, as they shared the same language and common decent. But the interests of the creoles elites started to conflict with the interest of the colonizers and therefore common interest became important in the conceptualization of the nation-states. After the struggles for independence the former

administrative units in Latin America became the territorial units for the different nation-states.

The creole elites were inspired by enlightenment ideas of freedom and equality, however they did not always followed these ideas in practice. The social hierarchies in the newly established republics in Latin America led to differential qualification of being a civic citizen, based on class and racial status. And the elite's identification with whiteness in the nineteenth century was seen as the basis for national progress (Larrain 2000). Later, in the twentieth century, with the emerging of populist governments in Latin America, common interest and socio-economic conditions led to the inclusion of more groups, such as the middle classes, into political life. But society was still very hierarchical dividing people into social classes and racism was prevalent (Larrain 2000: 100-101).

In many countries in Latin America, from the mid-twentieth century onwards, questions about ethnicity became of great importance in the imagination of the nation-state. The ruling elite often imposed their own ethnicity into the front ground. '*Mestizaje*', that implies that the mixing of Amerindians, Africans and Europeans has resulted in a new and unique ethnic or 'racial' identity, often became the framework for nation building. Through '*mestizaje*' the state and elites denied ethnic diversity and referred to '*mestizo*' as a new national ethnicity or 'race' in attempts to create a homogenous national culture (Baronov & Yelvington 2003: 224; Sanabria 2007: 126-130; Wade 2007: 6). Thus, the nation-states in Latin America, based on the civic conceptualization, also started to look for an ethnic element to create national consciousness among the population.

For the above reasons it can be argued that national identities emerged among Latin American countries on the base of the civic principle. But these national identities were often exclusionary due to class and racial divisions. The elite often imposing their ideas of the supposed superiority of whiteness and later '*mestizaje*' in what the components of the nation-state where supposed to be. Still, the importance of the common people must not be overlooked in the constructions of national identity. Expressions of popular culture are also important component of the national identity in Latin American countries (Rowe & Schelling 1991). Thus, strong national identities exist in Latin American countries not only articulated from above, by the state and the elite, but also articulated from below, by the common people.

National identities exist in the public sphere, through discourses from the state, school, media, etcetera (Anderson 2006; Larrain 2000: 34). These discourses have influenced the formation of a national identity of my Latino informants through the use of symbols like the

national flag, the national shield, and the national hymn. The importance of these symbols for my Latino informants is well illustrated by the following fieldwork notes of my interview with Carla from Colombia:

During my interview with Carla, I asked her if she could tell me something about the national symbols of her home country and the importance of these symbols for her. She responded the following: ‘The flag of Colombia is divided in three colors: yellow, blue, and red [she shows me the flag K vd S]. Half of the flag is yellow which represents the richness, so there is a lot of richness in Colombia. [Blue stand for] the sky and the oceans and [red stand for] the spilled blood (...) The national hymn is composed by some very pretty verses [she sings a part of the hymn K vd S]. The words are very significant; they refer to everything that has happened [in the history of Colombia K vd S]. It is a very pretty hymn, it is beautiful’, so Carla told me.

National identities also exist on a social base, as personal and groups subjectivity representing national identities, which are expressed in practices, ways of living and feelings of people (Anderson 2006; Larrain 2000: 34). This appears to be very strong for the Latino immigrants in Curaçao who are proud of their national origins, and feel a strong connection with their country of origin and their national group. Among the Latino immigrants from the same country of origin in Curaçao, often strong feelings of togetherness and similarity exist. The Colombian community in Curaçao is an illustrative example. When I asked Ana C. from Colombia if I was right that the Colombian group is one of the most united in Curaçao, she explained to me the following:

‘We show quite some unity yes. What happens is that in Colombia there is a cultural attachment that comes from childhood; let’s say from the schools, from the pre-kinder, they show the children what their country is, their flag, their hymn (...) therefore there is a strong cultural attachment that grows from childhood. So, what happens is that when the Colombian is outside of his or her country they have the tendency to search for those cultural values. They search for the television package that has the most Colombian channels in order to feel more united to their country. On base of that is that the Colombians are more united [more than other Latino immigrant groups K vd S] and when there is a cultural activity where those values are going to be reflected you see the Colombians go’, so Ana C. said.

This quote illustrates that the national identity that is presented to a child in the public sphere, such as in school, grows into a national identity in the social sphere, in the feelings of people who reflect this feelings in their ways of living and practices in a foreign country.

According to Castles (2000: 170) nationalism implies the construction of myths of common origin, traditions and culture in order to achieve the integration of people into the 'imagined community'. Latin American immigrants in Curaçao have strong nationalist feelings towards their country of origin. As argued by Francisco, an immigrant from the Dominican Republic:

'I have patriotic feelings. I would die for my country. I do not forget my home country'.

The rest of my Latino informants expressed similar feelings towards their countries of origin. These national feelings are reflected in for example the way in which Latinos decorate their homes in Curaçao. Many of my Latino informants have national symbols such as the flag and souvenirs from their home country in their homes in Curaçao. Miguel from Venezuela told me the following about this subject during my interview with him:

[Do you have national things at your home? K vd S]

'Yes. I have a t-shirt of the baseball team, I have a flag (...) Every time I go to Venezuela I try to bring a souvenir or something, some kind of memory, a key ring, an ash tray'

[What does this mean for you? K vd S]

'To be a little bit closer to home, to my family, bringing a small piece of what was, or what is mine. Having it closer to myself', so Miguel told me.

The national identity of my Latino informants is also reflected in the cultural expressions in which they engage in the host society. I have argued above that the conceptualization of Latin American nation-states relies on a civic conceptualization, based on common interests, rights and duties. I will illustrate below that a cultural component to national identities also exists in Latin American countries. Nation-states try to find a way to create unity and a national consciousness among its members. In order to do so, multicultural civic societies can rely on common symbols and myths of origin and give a cultural component to the nation-state (Smith 1986: 130-152).

## **2.2 Cultural components of national identity**

Cultural expressions such as religion, art, music, literature, poetry, etcetera, can all be discussed in relation to national identity (Larrain 2000). Because I do not have enough space

to encompass all these subjects in this thesis I have decided to elaborate upon those cultural elements my Latino informants in Curaçao have brought to the fore as important aspects of their national identity. I will turn now to the discussion of these cultural elements, namely: food and drinks, music and dance, sports, clothing and speech style.

Food is a cultural aspect often addressed by my Latino informants as an important element of their national identity. We can learn a lot about the culture of people by taking a closer look to what people eat (Sanabria 2007: 250). For Latin American immigrants in Curaçao food is an element through which their national identity is kept alive. '*Arroz moro*' for example is a typical Dominican dish. The dish, that is prepared with rice and brown beans, is a part of what being a Dominican means. Other examples are the Colombian '*arroz con coco*', that is rice with coconut, and the famous Venezuelan '*arepa*', that is bread made out of rice. Most of my Latino informants express this element of their national identity in the new society as they continue to make their traditional dishes in Curaçao, for their daily consumptions as well as for social gatherings.

Drinks can also be seen as a cultural element of the national identity of Latinos in Curaçao. The kind of beer people drink is an illustrative example. According to Fernando, an immigrant from the Dominican Republic, he drinks the beer '*Presidente*' because this beer is part of the Dominican culture. The beer was introduced in the Dominican Republic by the ex-dictator Trujillo and has maintained its privileged position since then. Although people in the Dominican Republic may also drink other brands of beer, in a foreign country it is always the '*Presidente*', that is a Dominican custom, so Fernando told me. The introduction of the '*Presidente*' beer as part of the national identity by Trujillo shows that food and drinks can serve as means for the state to creating a national consciousness (Sanabria 2007: 270). Furthermore, the beer brand that my Latino informants consume also serves as means drawing the lines between the national groups of Latinos in Curaçao. The Dominicans for example drink the beer '*Presidente*' while the Venezuelans drink a beer called '*Polar*'.

Through music and dance a sense of belonging to a certain national group is also created and expressed. Bachata and merengue are music styles typical from the Dominican Republic. Most of the Dominican immigrants I talked with for my research listen and often dance these music styles. It makes them feel Dominicans. Salsa is a music style typical for the Cubans and cumbia and vallenato are typical for the Colombians. Among some of my Latino informants, mostly men, sports also play a role in the articulation and expression of their national identity in Curaçao. A group of Peruvians and a group of Chileans for instance have formed their own

football teams in Curaçao. Another illustrative example is the importance of baseball for the national identity of Dominicans. Baseball is very popular in the Dominican Republic and creates pride among Dominicans. Some of my Dominican informants often wear a cap with the letter L on it. The letter L stands for the famous baseball team ‘Licey’ in the Dominican Republic. This example also illustrates another way in which Latinos in Curaçao demonstrate their nation identity: through clothing. The wearing of the cap with the letter L shows they are from the Dominican Republic and are proud of their national baseball team. Another example is the typical Colombian hat, the ‘*sombrero volteado*’. It is not uncommon in Curaçao to see a Colombian with the ‘*sombrero volteado*’ or a t-shirt with the ‘*sombrero volteado*’ on it. Furthermore, every national group has a different way of speaking the Spanish language. Speech style is also an aspect of the national identity of my Latino informants.

In the previous chapter I argue that food, music, and the Spanish language are important aspects of the ethnic identity of my Latino informants. Indeed, rice is for example an important component of the diet in many Latin American countries (Sanabria 2007: 258). Yet, as mentioned above, food is also a cultural aspect that draws the lines between the different national groups. The way in which rice is prepared is different for each national group. Furthermore, most of my Latino informants do not exclude music styles from other Latin American countries. Mostly they listen and dance Latin music, including: bachata, merengue and salsa. But music and dance can also be seen as elements of their national identities, drawing the lines between different national groups, and the same goes for the way in which the Spanish language is spoken. Thus, these cultural elements create similarities between the Latinos but at the same time they draw the lines between different national groups.

### **2.3 The organization of Latinos in Curaçao through national lines**

To maintain their national identity, to provide mutual support, to develop networks and to maintain their cultural characteristics and practices, Latin American immigrants in Curaçao often turn to their national groups and national group forming is reinforced in the new society. This national group forming can be seen in the way in which Latin American immigrants have organized themselves on the island, based on their nationality. The three largest groups of Latin American immigrants: Dominicans, Colombians and Venezuelans, have their own ways of organizing. Some of the smaller groups of Latin American immigrants have also organized themselves through national lines.

**Text box 2: Celebration of the Independence Day of the Dominican Republic in Curacao**



Photo taken by the author

One hundred and sixty-six years ago on a 27<sup>th</sup> of February the Dominican Republic obtained its independence. Today, on Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> of February the '*Asociación de Dominicanos Unidos en Curacao*' organizes a party to celebrate the Independence Day of their country of origin. I arrive at the festivity around 1 pm. The association is completely adorned with flags and balloons in the colors of the Dominican flag: white, red and blue (see photo above). People are loudly talking with one another while the traditional Dominican music: merengue and bachata plays on the background. Typical Dominican food: meat with '*arroz moro*' (rice with brown beans) is being served.

Around 3 pm. the festivity officially starts. The man who gives the opening speech for the festivity is a Dominican immigrant who works at a radio station. 'Welcome all to this festivity, hoping that with the few people we are, we reach the rest of the Dominican people also celebrating the Independence Day of the Dominican Republic. For this festivity we have this evening the presentation of Miss Virginia, words of Don Fernando [the president of the association K vd S], the hymn of Curacao and the hymn of the Dominican Republic and several activities in the evening', so the speech goes. Around one hour later the dancing group of the Dominican Republic in Curacao '*Caribbean Tropical*' is introduced for their first performance. The girls and one boy give a performance of typical Dominican folklore dance, followed by a bachata. The performers are dressed in the colors of the Dominican flag. Delia, the leader of the dancing group, also sings two merengue songs and after the performance everybody starts dancing merengue and bachata. The festivity goes on till 10 pm.

The immigrants from the Dominican Republic have an association at the neighborhood Santa Rosa. The association is called the '*Asociación de Dominicanos Unidos en Curacao*'. Their goals are to provide help for Dominicans in need, insure a better integration of the immigrants from the Dominican Republic in Curaçao, united them, provide education for Dominicans in Curaçao, and teach the youth about the history of their home country. It is an association which already exists for ten years and organizes social and cultural activities, like the celebration of the Independence Day of the Dominican Republic (see text box 2), and the celebration of the day of the Dominican mothers. On Saturdays and Sundays, Dominicans come together at the association where typical Dominican food is served and people dance bachata and merengue. During the festivities and reunions organized by the '*Asociación de Dominicanos Unidos en Curacao*' the national identity is expressed in talks and

speeches about the history and the culture of the Dominican Republic. When I asked Fernando from the Dominican Republic, the founder of the association, what significance it has for the Dominican community in Curaçao to have their own association, he answered as follows:

‘It means a lot, it is really important because that makes us identify as a community, organized, and where there is organization it can be said there is civilization, that there is order and respect, and at the same time as the world-wide thought says: “unity creates the force”. If we are united as our symbol says we can easily solve our problems’.

The Dominican immigrants in Curaçao also have a dance group called the ‘*Caribbean Tropical*’. This group performs modern and folklore dances during the festivities organized by the Dominican association (see text box 2) and it also represented the Dominican Republic at the Carnival parade of this year (see text box 3). Furthermore, different members of the Dominican association have decided to found an ‘*Instituto Duarte*’ in Curaçao. The reason for founding this institution is to maintain alive the ideals of the ideologist of the independence struggle of the Dominican Republic, Juan Pablo Duarte.

The immigrants from Colombia are well known for their unity as a national group in Curaçao. They have two folkloric groups, the ‘*Folklore de Colombia*’ and the ‘*Grupo folklórico danza raíces de Colombia*’ which perform during social and cultural activities and festivities, such as the celebration of the Independence Day of Colombia. The difference between both folkloric groups is their orientation towards the folklore in Colombia. The group ‘*Folklore de Colombia*’ is oriented towards the culture of the coast of Colombia and performances dances as the cumbia and the porro; while the ‘*Grupo folklórico danza raíces de Colombia*’ is more oriented towards the inland culture of Colombia and performances dances as the tres, the bambuco and the pasilla. The group of ‘*Folklore de Colombia*’ has represented the Colombian immigrants in the Carnival parade of Curaçao for already ten years in a row (see text box 3).

Besides the two groups of folklore, there are other activities that unite the Colombian immigrants in Curaçao. For seven years in a row, during the Independence Day of Colombia on the 20<sup>th</sup> of July, the ‘*Feria de Talento Colombiano*’ is organized. The director of this activity, Ana C., explained to me that during this celebration many people come and it shows the Colombian talent in all aspects: culture, culinary and artistic talent. Furthermore, on

Saturdays, Ana C. has her own Colombian radio program, the *'Encuentro Colombiano'*. Ana C. explained to me why the radio program is important for Colombians in Curacao.

**Text box 3: Carnival in Curacao - A national expression for Latinos as well**

Carnival is by far the biggest cultural event in Curacao. Every year during the parade, streets are full of people. Not only locals but also lots of tourists come to the island to join this festivity. The preparations start long before the parade actually takes place and it becomes a main topic of daily talk among the entire community.

In the afternoon of Sunday February 14<sup>th</sup> the neighborhood Otrabanda is crowded with people anxious to be surprised by this year's parade. The celebration of carnival starts hours before the parade, while people are drinking, chatting, and dancing. During the parade, groups are dressed in colorful costumes and the island's typical music Tumba is played everywhere.



Photos taken by the author

Among the first groups in the Carnival parade is the group of the Dominican Republic. Their costumes are made by the colors of the Dominican flag, typical Dominican dances are performed, and a big flag of the Dominican Republic is carried with them (see photo above). Delia is an immigrant from the Dominican Republic. She is the leader of the Dominican dance group 'Caribbean Tropical'.

When I asked Delia afterwards, what significance it had for her to participate in the carnival parade, she responded the following: 'A very patriotic significance, because we in the Dominican Republic do not celebrate Carnival because of the colors, music and clothing, no, we celebrated it because when it is Carnival we have a very patriotic date that is the 27 of February, the Independence Day, when the Dominican Republic obtained its freedom (...) for me [participating in] the Carnival parade was of huge importance because the Dominican Republic had not participated for many years in the Carnival of Curacao'.

The parade continues and after many groups, another Latin American country is represented in the parade: Colombia. Just like the Dominicans, the group of Colombia is easy to recognize as they are dressed in the colors of the Colombian flag: blue, yellow, and red (see photo above). Furthermore, they carry a big board with them saying 'Folklore de Colombia, 10 años de historia' (Folklore of Colombia, 10 years of history) and they play the typical Colombian music cumbia.

The group 'Folklore de Colombia' has represented the Colombian immigrants in the Carnival parade of Curacao for already ten years in a row, as I was told afterwards by Carla one of the directives of the group. According to Carla, the group has three goals. The primary one is to show something pretty and positive of Colombia opposing to the negative view of the country around the world. Second goal is to integrate more countries with them. The third goal is to internationalize the Carnival of Curacao.

'The program in Curaçao is something that is interesting for the Colombians because through it they feel united because every Saturday they are searching for what is going to be said in the program', so Ana C. told me.

This quote clearly reflects the 'imagined community' of Benedict Anderson (2006) who argues that unity between people is obtained through for example the newspapers. The same can be said here for the radio program presented by Ana C. Although the Colombians who listen to it live in a foreign country they feel connected as Colombians through the radio program without the need to know each other personally.

The Venezuelans in Curaçao are a special case. There is a Venezuelan organization called the '*Instituto Venezolano para la Cultura y Cooperación*', which is part of a cultural interchange between Venezuela and Curaçao and organizes cultural and educative activities. However, as mentioned by Andrés Hernandez, the director of the organization, generally there are only a few Venezuelans participating in the activities organized by them. According to Andrés this can be explained by the strong political division that has emerged among the Venezuelans, those who are in favor of President Chavez and those who are against him. Another reason why Venezuelan immigrants do not gather in Curaçao given by my informants is that they do not have a culture of migration like other countries such as Colombia and the Dominican Republic, and therefore they do not gather as an immigrant group.

Yet, it is curious that at the same time, business organizations emerge among Venezuelan immigrants, such as the '*Cámara de Empresarios Venezolanos Curazoleños*'. Furthermore, Venezuelans may also be enrolled in national networks through their work. For example, Raul, Pedro, Miguel, and Miguel T. from Venezuela work at the same Venezuelan bank in Curaçao. According to Andrés Hernandez this can be explained because the majority of Venezuelans who decided to migrate to the island are of a middle and high socio-economic class, they decided to migrate in order to invest in the island and start their own business. Most of the Venezuelan immigrants included in my research group can indeed be argued to be from a middle socio-economic class. That the majority of the Venezuelans are of a middle and high socio-economic class can also explain why the Venezuelans in Curaçao are not as united as other groups like the Dominicans and the Colombians. According to Joshua (local), those immigrants from a middle and higher socio-economic class do not identify with immigrants from a lower class and prefer to identify and group with the middle and higher classes in Curaçao. Different factors can help explain why the Venezuelans in Curaçao are not so united

as a group, but this does not mean that they do not identify nationally, as most of my Venezuelan informants identify nationally.

The smaller groups of Latino immigrants in Curaçao also have their way of organizing through national lines. The Cubans for example used to have a group in order to help each other mutually to send money and medicine to their families in their home country. Although this group does not exist anymore, the Cubans still united themselves. As I was told by José Miguel from Cuba, a group of Cubans united themselves to help those Cubans who live illegally in Curaçao and in order to establish a Cuban consulate in Curaçao. The Peruvians in Curaçao have also organized themselves. A Peruvian association was created one year ago. This association organizes social activities to celebrated important national dates such as the Independence Day of Peru and the day of work. During the festivities typical Peruvian food is served and Peruvian music is played. The association also helps Peruvians in difficulties in Curaçao and is trying to establish a Peruvian consulate in Curaçao. For other Latin American immigrants it is more difficult to turn to their national groups as these groups are very small. Adriana for example is from El Salvador and argues that there are only two persons from her country of origin living in Curaçao. And Lorena from Puerto Rico only knows one other immigrant from her country of origin.

Through the organizations described above, my Latino informants show their national identity, discourses of national history and culture are expressed, and national networks emerge through which mutual support is provided on an economic and social level. A great wiliness exists among Latinos from the same country of origin to help each other. What Adriano from Peru, commented about this issue is a good illustration:

'It is important to help the people of your country, our people, we are going to put it that way, because the Dominicans have their association, the Colombians have, now the Peruvians that recently formed one. We like to help people of our country that find themselves in an undocumented position here'.

Many of my Latino informants say something similar to what Adriano commented, therefore it can be argued that the Latinos in Curaçao feel a strong obligation to help the people from their own country. Mutual support and economic help is not only provided through the organizations but also in a more informal ways. Sofia, an immigrant from Colombia, for example told me that when a Colombian she knows needs to travel to Colombia for some kind

of emergency but does not have the economic resources to pay for the ticket, she calls all the Colombians she knows and most of them collaborate to help their compatriot in difficulties.

Larrain (2000: 198-201) addresses exclusion as one of the key features of Latin America's identity. As mentioned above, within the conceptualization of the nation-states in Latin America the disproportionate power of the elites has been persistent. The differences between rich and poor are large in contemporary Latin American societies. It is interesting to see that in Curaçao the divisions between Latin American immigrants of different socio-economic classes seem to blur. An illustrative example is the Dominican association in Curaçao where Dominicans from different social classes come together and help each other. The reason is solidarity; they are all immigrants in a foreign country and therefore they need each other's help. But, although the divisions in social class seem to blur in Curaçao, they still exist. Some of my Latino informants told me that the higher and middle classes Latino immigrants from the same countries of origin often do not gather with those from a low socio-economic class. As I argued above, socio-economic class might be the reason why Venezuelans are not as united as other Latino immigrant groups in Curaçao.

#### **2.4 Transnationalism and identity**

The strong connections Latin American immigrants in Curaçao feel with their country of origin are also expressed in the transnational practices in which my Latino informants involve. With the improvements in travel and technology it becomes easier for immigrants to maintain close ties with their homeland, highlighting the role of transnational practices and processes. Contemporary migration flows often take on as an enduring process that encompasses several generations. It does not only imply the movement of people from one society to another; immigrants and their decent often maintain ties with their home country. Due to these links migration networks emerge between two or more nation-states (Castles 2000: 25; Olwig 2003). Transnational networks have emerged between Latin American immigrants in Curaçao and their countries of origin. According to Castles (2000: 25) transnational practices refer to the way immigrants sustain social relations along family, economic, and political lines, linking the country of origin with the society where immigrants settle.

Generally, the social relations my Latino informants sustain with their country of origin go through family lines. They have regular contact with their families and try to visit them frequently. When they migrated, most of my Latino informants left at least some of their family members behind: fathers, mothers, brothers, children, etcetera. With them they stay in

contact, to make sure that they are doing fine, that they are healthy and economically well. This strong transnational identity my Latino informants feel through their connectedness with their family does not always have to be linked to their country of origin. As argued by Olwig (2003) transnational identities do not always have to be linked to an actual nation-state. Transnational identities are multiple and can also depend on other factors than the nation-state, such as family networks or specific places, villages, regions, cities, where the immigrant comes from. The importance my Latino informants give to the contact with their families is great and not always connected to their home country as sometimes their families also migrate to other places such as the United States or the Netherlands. Emilia for instance is from Venezuela and lives already twenty seven years in Curaçao; all her brothers and sisters and her mother live in Miami, Emilia stays in regular contact with them, and instead of spending her holidays in Venezuela she goes to the United States to be with her family.

Transnational networks have also emerged along economic lines. Those Latinos who migrated to Curaçao to obtain a better economic position and help their families in their countries of origin send remittances back home; connecting Curaçao with their country of origin through the family networks, but also through the remittances the families receive from the Latino immigrants. With the money Isabela send to her family in Colombia for instance, the study of her three children is paid. Furthermore, some of my Latino informants also stay connected with their country of origin through economic lines to obtain better and cheaper materials or through their work, as is the case for Raul who works at a bank with predominantly clients from Venezuela and Emilia and Amaya also from Venezuela who work at the Venezuelan consulate.

Transnational networks through political lines also exist. Sofia from Colombia for example stays connected and active in political issues in Colombia through the internet, and some of the Colombian immigrants in Curaçao are entitled to vote for the presidential elections in their country of origin. Furthermore, medical care is also an issue through which transnational networks have emerged. Although not mentioned in the literature, medical care seems to be import for my Latino informants to maintain contact with their home countries. Many of my Latino informants have argued that the medical care in their countries of origin is a lot better than the medical care in Curaçao. Therefore, they often prefer to travel back home and have a medical check-up or a medical treatment in their home countries. Especially Colombia and Venezuela are often referred to by my Latino informants as having good medical care.

Transnational networks have also emerged between Latin American immigrants in Curaçao and their home countries through religion. Miguel from Venezuela for instance believes in '*Santeria*', a religion that has its origins in Africa and is the result of syncretism between different traditions in Latin America (Sanabria 2007: 201-206). Miguel maintains contact with people in Venezuela to practice '*Santeria*'. Another example is Gustavo, a Colombian priest at an Evangelic church in Curaçao. He maintains transnational networks with different Latin American countries to invite priest to Curaçao and exchange religious knowledge.

My Latino informants also stay in touch with their country of origin through the radio, television and internet. Anderson (2006) emphasizes the importance of technological improvements in the creation of feelings of togetherness among members of same nation-state. Many of my Latino informants read newspapers and watch television channels from their countries of origin. They want to be informed about the situation in their home countries because it is their country and mostly their families still live there; they want to know what happens in their country. Through these transnational connections they keep their national identity alive. In order to give a better illustration of the transnational networks that emerge among Latino immigrants living in Curaçao and the significance of these transnational networks for my Latino informants I will give the case of Carla in text box 4.

Glick-Schiller and Fouron (1999: 344) talk about 'transmigrants', these are persons who migrate to

**Text box 4: The transnational practices of Carla Ramirez**

Carla is an immigrant from Colombia, married to an Antillean man and living already for twenty years in Curacao. 'A part of a live time' so she says. But her country of origin is still an important reference point for her identity and she is involved in several transnational practices. At her house she has a direct TV station from Colombia which enables her to watch the news from Colombia every day. Besides, she reads the newspapers from Colombia on the internet. For the group of Colombian folklore in which she plays an important role, she has contacts with people in Colombia to obtain dresses and shoes required for the participation of the group in the Carnival parade of Curacao each year. All materials for the group she buys in Colombia because there she can get it for a much better price. Besides these business relations, she stays in contact with her family in Colombia and with her son who migrate to the Netherlands. She praises the internet, because through the internet she can stay in contact with her family. She calls her mom almost every day for about one hour. She stays in contact with her family so they do not lose that 'nucleus family' contact. 'Because we are so far away and do not see each other every day, but we are there talking, and logically I think it feels like we are there (...) because when we talk one feels like the person is right there. And nowadays one can see them through the computer. With the webcam it is easier, one can see them and they can see me, it is easier', so Carla told during my interview with her.

another country but still have close ties with their homeland, even if they are also involved in new relationships in the host society. Most of my Latino informants can be argued to be ‘transmigrants’, as almost all of them maintain close ties with their country of origin, but are also involved in relationships in Curaçao. The ties that my Latino informants maintain with their country of origin helps maintaining their national identity, but, as I will illustrated in the next chapter, the new relationships in which they engage in Curaçao makes them identify with Curaçao as well. Thus, transnationalism brings the multiplicity of identities to the fore. These Latin American immigrants cannot simply be identified with one nation-state with a specific cultural background, they have cultural characteristics of their country of origin and they maintain close ties with their homeland, but they also integrate in the community of Curaçao and take over cultural characteristics of the new society.

To conclude, Latin American immigrants in Curaçao strongly identify nationally. This national identity becomes evident in the feelings of belonging and togetherness my Latino informants have towards their nation-state and national group. Food and drinks, music and dance, sports, clothing and speech style are important aspects of their national identity. Latinos in Curaçao turn to their national groups and organize themselves through national lines. The strong connection they feel with their country of origin is also expressed in the transnational practices in which they engage. Most of my Latino informants can be seen as ‘transmigrants’ as they maintain contact with their countries of origin but also engage in new relationships in Curaçao. The relationships in which my Latino informants engage in the host society may result in them identifying with Curaçao as well. In the next chapter I will discuss how Latinos in Curaçao identify with the host society.

### **3. Integration of Latin American immigrants in Curaçao**

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In the previous chapters I have explained how Latin American immigrants in Curaçao use their ethnicity and nationality as important references in the construction of their identity. But in my talks and interviews with Latin American immigrants in Curaçao, the identification of them with the host society also turned out to be an important topic. Many of my Latino informants argue not only to feel connected and identify with their ethnic and national group but also with the host society. Identity is neither fixed nor something a person has. As time passes Latinos in Curaçao may take over cultural elements of the host society and start to see themselves in a different way. They might adjust to their new environment in such a way that the host society also becomes a reference point for their identity. Identity is multiple: quite some of my Latino informants identify with their ethnic group, with their national group and with the host society and the importance of each identity depends on the context. Yet, this does not mean that these identities are fragmented and cannot be used at the same time. Several of my Latino informants for instance refer to themselves as Latinos, from a particular country of origin, living for such a long period of time in Curaçao that they also identify with the host society.

People want to belong somewhere, be part of something, and feel at home in the society they live in. Latino immigrants who feel at home in Curaçao are more likely to also identify with the host society and start to feel a sense of belonging towards the island. Ghorashi (2001: 180-181) makes a differentiation between two ways of approaching home. The first approach is a territorial approach of home; home is seen as a place. In this way, home is automatically considered to be the country of origin. The second approach is a diasporic approach to home; home does not have to be where you come from, but is where you feel safe and comfortable. It is not one place on the map, but is related to the feelings of a person. From this point of view home can be everywhere. Belonging somewhere is often associated with feeling at home. When immigrants see home as a territorial place it is likely that they will feel they belong to their home country. But when immigrants see home as where they feel comfortable and safe they may develop a sense of belonging towards the host society as well. In this chapter I will elaborate upon the way in which Latino immigrants identify with Curaçao and how they give meaning to the concepts of home and belonging.

### **3.1 Identification with the host society**

Christian is an immigrant from Colombia. Eight years ago he migrated to Curaçao to keep his sister company for a while. His plan was to continue his migratory journey to Spain; however he found a job in Curaçao and decided to stay. Christian identifies as a Latino as well as a Colombian. But he also identifies with Curaçao, as illustrated by the following quotation:

'I was born in Colombia and therefore my origin lays in Colombia. But at the moment I am living here and I have to do the things of Curaçao, you understand? If I am living here at the moment, in this moment I feel a Curaçaoan citizen, because I am working and doing things for Curaçao (...) I have a brother here, he is also a football arbiter, he likes to relate with the Colombian community, so I say to him: "we come from Colombia to relate with Colombians, to continue in the same ambiance?" I do not think it is right, ok? When you are in another community, another culture, you need to integrate in that culture, live like in this case a Curaçaoan, eat what the Curaçaoans eat, dance what the Curaçaoans dance, involucrate more in the culture. Thus, in my case, I have a lot of contact with the local population', so Christian says.

According to Ericksen (2002: 9) immigrants often tend to hold on to their cultural heritage in the new society. As described in the previous chapters, this is true for the Latin American immigrants in Curaçao as my Latino informants strongly identify with their ethnicity and nationality. However, as becomes clear out of the example of Christian, my Latino informants can also identify with the host society. Their ethnic and national way of identifying in Curaçao does not impede them to also identify with the host society, bringing to the fore the multiplicity of identity.

The longer immigrants stay in the host society, the more elements of the new culture they may adopt. Therefore, time is an influential factor in the identification of my Latino informants with the host society. Many of my Latino informants say to have experienced some difficulties at the beginning while adapting to the new context, such as the cultural differences, the mentality of the local people, and the language. With the passing of time many argue they got used to the lifestyle in Curaçao, they integrated well, and feel part of the community. Lucia for example migrated twenty four years ago from the Dominican Republic to Curaçao; she told me the following about her identity:

'Sentimentally I am a Latina, but the sentiments at the same time are divided in two. Because after you have more than half of your life living in a country, you already consider yourself from both places. If it is possible, I even incline a bit more for here. Because here I live, here I

have my children, it is more, I have become a stranger in my own country of origin because I only go there for a while in my free time. So if you analyze it, it is fifty-fifty emotionally: fifty percent Latina, fifty percent Antillean’.

Hence, the longer the immigrant lives in the host society the stronger the connection towards Curaçao. Immigrants may also feel a connection towards the host society without living there for a long period of time. Lorena from Puerto Rico migrated to Curaçao only one year ago and already feels part of the community and feels a commitment towards the island. Although she does not see herself as a Curaçaoan, but as a Puerto Rican, she feels part of the island’s community. Thus, the connection my Latino informants feel with Curaçao does not always depend on their time living on the island.

The age of migration is also an influential factor. Maria for instance comes from Colombia; she migrated when she was eight years old. She identifies with Colombia as well as with Curaçao. According to Maria sometimes she feels more Curaçaoan than the Curaçaoans themselves because she is involved in environmental activities to protect and improve the island. Lucia from the Dominican Republic and Juanita from Cuba also argue to identify with Curaçao because they migrated at a young age. They have developed themselves in Curaçao; they adjusted themselves to the lifestyle on the island and therefore they identify with Curaçao.

The identification of Latin American immigrants with the host society is often related to them feeling part of the community. Many of my Latino informants argue to be part of the community because they work and they pay taxes, in other words, they are contributing to society. Feeling accepted by the local population is an important factor influencing whether Latino immigrants identify with the host society or not. The concept ‘*Yu di Kòrsou*’ is important to understand this. During the past few decades there has been a continues search for what it means to be Curaçao: is it part of the Caribbean, part of the Dutch Kingdom or is it part of today’s ‘global village’. In public discussions about national identity and citizenship, the concept of ‘*Yu di Kòrsou*’ (literally translated from Papiamentu: Child of Curaçao) is of crucial importance. What does it mean to be a ‘*Yu di Kòrsou*’ and what is Curaçaoan culture are important discussions in Curaçao (Allen 2009: 2).

Sofia from Colombia feels a ‘*Yu di Kòrsou*’, she lives in Curaçao for already sixteen years, she is married to a local man and she has good relationships with locals. When I asked her why she sees herself as a ‘*Yu di Kòrsou*’ Sofia answered me as follows:

'I share in this community, I live in this community and I contribute to this community. I do not feel like a foreigner here'.

Although Latino immigrants like Sofia can feel themselves a '*Yu di Kòrsou*' it is also up to the local community to accept them as such. I will elaborate further upon this issue in the fourth chapter.

Furthermore, the close relationships in which my Latino informants engage with the local population, such as marriage and friendships, also make them feel part of the host society. Those Latino immigrants who maintain close relationships with locals mostly feel a stronger identification with Curaçao than those who do not. The identification with Curaçao often depends on the situation. Those Latin American immigrants who agree to identify with Curaçao do so when interacting with the local population, when speaking Papiamentu, and when they need to represent Curaçao. Lucia from the Dominican Republic for example argues that she identifies with Curaçao in certain situations and in others she identifies as a Latina, when I asked her in which moments she identifies with Curaçao she told me the following:

'When I am going to vote, I am saying that then you have to fulfill your obligations as an Antillean, I have to vote for a government, it is then when the Antillean comes out, that I have to search for information in the newspapers, I have to read, I have to watch television to see what the positive and what the negative things are of a [political K vd S] party and make a good decision. So that is when the Antillean comes out'.

As described in chapter one and two, during the activities Latinos organize in Curaçao the ethnic and national identity is expressed. But the identity with the host society also comes up in several occasions. During the celebration of the Independence Day of the Dominican Republic organized by the Dominican association in Curaçao for example the national hymn of the Dominican Republic was sung, but the hymn of Curaçao as well. Furthermore, in the speeches that were given during the celebration the connection between Curaçao and the Dominican Republic was highlighted. For example, the story was told that the national independence hero of the Dominican Republic, Juan Pablo Duarte, was exiled and well received in Curaçao. The historical connection was used in the speeches to make the people present aware of the national identity of the Dominicans in Curaçao but also to make them aware the Dominicans in Curaçao must be thankful towards the host society and identify with Curaçao as well, because their hero Juan Pablo Duarte was once well received in Curaçao.

This shows that the different ways of identifying of my Latino informants are not fragmented; they can be emphasized at the same time.

### **3.2 Feelings of home and belonging**

The concepts of home and belonging are highly intertwined and a differentiation between the two is difficult to make as people often use feeling at home and belonging interchangeable. However, Latin American immigrants in Curaçao often give a different meaning to feelings of home than to belonging, therefore, a distinction between the two is useful here. Most of my Latino informants see home in a diasporic way as where they feel safe and comfortable, while their feelings of belonging are mostly connected to their home country.

Quite a lot of my Latino informants are well integrated in Curaçao; they have close relationships with locals and feel at home. Mostly the reason for them to feel at home in Curaçao is the security, the tranquility and the opportunities the island provides them, something they cannot find in their countries of origin. Another reason is that they have established their own families in Curaçao. Some of my Latino informants even argue that when they travel back to their country of origin they feel anxious to return to Curaçao after a few days or weeks because in Curaçao is their home, their lifestyle and family.

There are also Latino immigrants who feel at home in both places, in Curaçao and in their country of origin. They argue to be privileged to feel at home in both countries because they appreciated the good things their country of origin provides them and the good things Curaçao provides them, and therefore they can feel at home in both countries. Miguel from Venezuela even feels at home in three places: in his country of origin, in Venezuela and in the Netherlands where he lived several years. There are also those Latino immigrants who feel at home in Curaçao when they are gathered with other immigrants from the same country of origin or Latinos in general, as mentioned by Delia from the Dominican Republic during my interview with her:

‘[I feel at home when] I am united with people like here [at the association of Dominicans in Curaçao K vd S] who are also Dominicans, I feel more at home here than in my own house’.

The majority of my Latino informants feel at home in Curaçao, but there are also a few who do not. Those Latino immigrants who do not feel at home argue that the people and culture in Curaçao is different than in their country of origin and their family is not with them, and therefore they do not feel at home. Like Daniel from Cuba says:

'Feeling at home, what is feeling at home? Feeling comfortable with the people you love because at home is your family, the ones you love, the neighbors with whom you grow up, there is your medium. It is difficult to say I feel at home, it is saying you are comfortable, but I am not here out of pleasure rather out of necessity, although I do not feel bad here'.

As I will explain in the next chapter, discrimination can be argued to be an influential factor in whether immigrants feel at home or not in Curaçao. Yet, for those of my Latino informants who do not feel at home in Curaçao generally other reasons than discrimination seem to be more important, such as cultural differences and the absence of family and friends.

According to Ghorashi (2001) the structural differences between the home country and the host society is a crucial aspect influencing the feelings of home and belonging of immigrants. She argues that if the differences are large people may feel less at home. This is true for my research group, those Latino immigrants who experience the differences to be large feel less at home. The influence of the Latino culture over the years and a history of migration flows of Latinos to Curaçao and the fact that Spanish is widely spoken make the cultural differences smaller. Latin music for example is widely listened to in Curaçao and the typical Dominican rice '*arroz moro*' is served with a lot of local dishes. This makes it easier for the Latinos in Curaçao to find similarities in the new context and adapt faster. But, the differences between the country of origin and Curaçao depend on the personal experiences of the immigrant. For example, some Dominicans say that the differences between the Dominican Republic and Curaçao are very small, the language is similar, the climate is similar, the food is similar, and the people are similar, and they argue to have integrated well and feel at home in Curaçao. Other Dominicans experience large differences between the culture of their country of origin and Curaçao and do not feel at home. Some of my Latino informants experience large differences between Curaçao and their country of origin but still feel at home. This is related to their time in the host society. After a long time living in Curaçao they have adjusted to the differences and feel at home.

Ghorashi (2001) also points out that the size of the immigrant's group in the host country is an influential factor in the feelings of home and belonging. This is true for the majority of my Latino informants, they argue to feel better and more at home because of the presence of other immigrants from the same country of origin or Latinos in general. The Dominicans for example are a large group in Curaçao and they argue to feel more at home because of the presence of other Dominican immigrants. Because they are a large group they can provide

economic support and organize social and cultural activities, therefore the Dominicans often feel more at home. For the largest groups of Latino immigrants, the Dominicans, the Colombians and the Venezuelans, it is easy to turn to their national group, while the smaller groups of Latinos more often turn to the ethnic group.

Because of the large size of the immigrant's group my Latino informants are able to engage in social networks and cultural activities in the host society, they can express their ethnic and national identity in this way and therefore they feel more at home in Curaçao. Thus, actions undertaken by immigrants to feel more comfortable and at home in the host society may reinforce the feelings and expression of their ethnic and national identity. While when they feel more at home they generally also start identifying more with Curaçao, showing that ethnic and national identity and identification with the host society are linked. But not all Latin American immigrants feel the need to turn to their ethnic or national group to feel at home in the host society. Luis for instance assimilated to a great extent to the local culture, he mainly interacts with the local population and he identifies one hundred percent with Curaçao, so he told me.

The meaning that Latin American immigrants give to the concept of belonging is often different from the meaning they give to feeling at home. Most of my Latino informants argue they belong to their country of origin, although they may be integrated and feel at home in the host society. In their country of origin they grow up, where most of their family lives, where their roots lay, and therefore, there is where they belong, so they say. This feelings of belonging to their country of origin however, does not impede my Latino informants to also develop feelings of belonging towards Curaçao. Several of my Latino informants feel a strong connection with their country of origin as well as with Curaçao. They identify with their country of origin but they also identify with Curaçao, as mentioned by Geronimo from the Dominican Republic:

'It is important for me what happens in the Dominican Republic as well as what happens in Curaçao, I am divided between two loves and I love both of them equally'.

Geronimo strongly identifies as a Dominican in Curaçao and shows it by being very active in the Dominican association. He also identifies with Curaçao and he feels at home in the host society. Furthermore, he feels he belongs to Curaçao. When I asked him why he feels he belongs to Curaçao he answered as follows:

'I adapted here, I think going to another place, including returning to my home country, is like starting all over again and it is like leaving ten, eleven years behind just like the first time [when he migrated from the Dominican Republic to Curaçao K vd S]. Therefore I think if I have to fight for it I have to do it in Curaçao, give the maximum I have to continue to feel good here, to follow the rules here, because here I feel at home'.

This quotation also illustrates that although generally my Latino informants give a different meaning to feeling at home than to belonging, not all of them make the differentiation and sometimes they use feelings of home and belonging interchangeable.

Residence time is an influential factor in the feelings of home and belonging of my Latino informants. Most of those that are already for several years in Curaçao feel at home and also feel a stronger connection of belonging towards the island, compared to those who recently migrated. The age on which my Latino informants migrated is also an influential factor determining whether they feel they belong to Curaçao or not. If they live for already a long time on the island and migrated at a young age my Latino informants feel a strong connection with Curaçao. Juanita from Cuba migrated to Curaçao when she was seventeen years old; she mentioned to me the following about home and belonging:

'I feel like I have made my life as an adult here, and my family: my husband and my daughter are here, I have everything: my home, my work. I do not feel I belong to whatever other place. I can adapt myself to live in another place, yes, but here I feel at home'.

Whether migration is seen as permanent or not must also be taken into account. Quite a lot of my Latino informants say they are probably going to stay in Curaçao and therefore they can develop feelings of belonging towards the island. But there are some exceptions. Adriano from Peru for instance does not feel he belongs to Curaçao because he plans to go back to his country of origin. The same can be said for Isabela, who wants to return to Colombia.

Considering the above reasons, it is not surprising that integration is the most common acculturation strategy among my Latino informants in Curaçao. While adjusting to the new society my Latino informants adapt cultural elements of the host society, such as the local language Papiamentu. But at the same time they also maintain cultural elements particular to their ethnic and national groups, as I have illustrated in previous chapters. Latinos do not isolate themselves as ethnic and national groups in Curaçao; rather most of my Latino informants also establish new relationships in the host society and adjust themselves to the new context and take over cultural elements of the locals. But acculturation strategies do not

only depend on the choices that immigrants make. The expectations and views of the host society also play an important role. Both groups interact, shaping the acculturation process that takes place (Berry 2001; Castles & Miller 2003: 249-252; Chrysochoou 2004: xxiv-xxv).

To conclude, Latinos in Curaçao identify with the host society. The identification of my Latino informants with the host society is often referred to as them feeling part of the community in Curaçao. Feelings of home and belonging and the identity of my Latino informants are interrelated. I have illustrated in this chapter that most of my Latino informants see home in a diasporic way and therefore they feel at home in Curaçao. The feelings of belonging of my Latino informants are more often connected to their countries of origin. Even so, several of my Latino informants feel a strong connection with their country of origin and also with Curaçao. My Latino informants in Curaçao generally integrate in the host society. But the acculturation strategies embraced by them also depend on the way in which they are perceived by the host society, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

## 4. Latino immigrants and the locals: perceptions of the ‘other’

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Immigration often takes place in a time of economic and social changes. When the lives of people are changing in an unpredictable way it is likely that people will engage in strategies, such as stereotyping, discrimination and racism, to cope with these insecurities. Negative stereotyping, discrimination and racism towards ‘the other’ can be understood as attempts of people to position their own group in a better light and show the perceived superiority of the group they belong to (Chrysochoou 2004). Being seen as a member of a certain ethnic and national group has consequences; people have expectations and interpretations of that ethnic and national group and the possibility exists that membership to a certain ethnic and national group leads to discrimination and exclusion (Verkuyten 2005: 64).

A bad reputation of an ethnic and national group in the host society may lead immigrants to assimilate into mainstream society to avoid discrimination and racism. But it may also lead to the grouping of immigrants with the same nationality and ethnicity to find mutual support (Baud et al. 1996; Castles 2000; Castles & Miller 2003). In this chapter I will discuss (negative) stereotyping, discrimination and racism in relation to the identity formation of Latino immigrants in Curaçao. Furthermore, I will also elaborate upon the state policies towards Latin American immigrants in Curaçao, as the state plays an important role in the way immigrants are treated in the host society and vice versa, and therefore influences the identity formation of Latino immigrants in Curaçao.

### 4.1 Stereotyping the ‘other’

In a multicultural society like Curaçao, in which many ethnicities and nationalities interact with one another, stereotypes are attributed to the different groups in order to draw boundaries between them. Stereotypes inform people about the characteristics of the ‘other’ and therefore they help people to give meaning to the social complexity of the world they live in. Stereotyping refers to the creation and constant use of standardized notions of cultural differences of a group (Allen et al. 2003; Ericksen 2002: 29-30).

Especially the Latinas in Curaçao are negatively stereotyped. This negative stereotyping is related to prostitution. There are different reasons why Latinas in Curaçao are often associated with prostitution. One of the reasons is that the women who work at ‘*Campo Alegre*’, a prostitution resort in Curaçao, are mainly Latinas, no local women work there. ‘*Campo Alegre*’ was established by the Catholic Church as a prostitution resort for the mariners who stayed in Curaçao during the Second World War. In order to protect the local women, Latino

women were recruited to work as prostitutes. Another reason why Latinas in Curaçao are associated with prostitution is the '*sneks*'. '*Sneks*' are places where food and drinks are sold, and where loud music is played, mostly bachata. These '*sneks*' are often perceived to be places of hidden prostitution where mostly Dominican women work.

Furthermore, the Latinas are often seen as women who come to Curaçao to steal the husbands of the local women. The local women have the feeling they need to compete with the Latinas for the men in Curaçao and therefore they negatively stereotype the Latinas. Especially the Dominican women are stereotyped in this way. As argued by Christine (local) many marriages were destroyed in the past because of the coming of Dominican women to Curaçao. With the growing number of Colombian immigrants over the years, this role is said to be 'taken over' by the Colombian women, who are seen as more refined than the Dominicans. It is argued that these Latinas do not only come to Curaçao and destroy the marriage of the local women, but it is also said that these women do not marry out of love but they marry in order to obtain a residents permit and the Dutch citizenship, they seduce the local men to obtain their goals. In these situations the locals I talked with do not only negatively stereotype the Latinas but also the local men, they see the men who fall for the 'tramps' of these Latinas as dumb. The feeling that local women have that they need to compete with the Latinas for the local men can be understood looking at my research findings. Most of my Latina informants in Curaçao are indeed married to a local man. Of the eighteen Latinas I interviewed in Curaçao, fourteen are, or were, married to a local man. As an illustration I give a short description of some of my Latina informants who married a local man in text box 5.

Although the Latinas are mostly stereotyped in a negative way, there also exist positive stereotyping of the Latinas in Curaçao. Latinas are perceived to be very pretty in the eyes of the local men. During my interview with Professor Valdemar Marcha he told me that this can be explained because of the beauty standard in Curaçao. The light skin color and the straight hair are phenotypical appearances highly valued in Curaçao. Thus, the Latinas correspond to the existing standard of beauty in Curaçao. Furthermore, the Latinas are argued to take better care of their homes than the local women. One example often used by my informants is that the Latinas cook for their husbands, while the local women seldom do.

**Text box 5: Marriages of Latinas with local men and negative stereotyping**

*Frida* is twenty eight years old. She comes from Venezuela. She lives already fourteen years in Curacao. The reasons why she migrated are varied: family, politics, and better economic opportunities. Frida is married to a local man for already three years. She told me that there is negative stereotyping towards the Latinas because the local women say that they come to Curacao to steal their men. Furthermore, she says that Latinas often marry with a local for the Dutch nationality. When they marry with a local man they can obtain the naturalization papers easier. Yet, that is not her case, so Frida told me during an interview; she was already with her husband for five years before she eventually married him.

*Ariana* is from El Salvador, she is sixty five years old. She migrated forty years ago to marry a local man. They had met each other on a boat trip, they fell in love and Ariana decided to leave her country and move to Curacao.

*Carla* is fifty five years old, she is from Colombia. Carla migrated twenty years ago to Curacao after her daughter died and she did not want to stay in Colombia any longer. During her trips to Curacao she had already known her future husband, a local Dutch. Just like Frida, Carla experiences negative stereotyping and discrimination because she is married to a local man. And the fact that Carla her husband is much older than she is, makes it worse. But, Carla says she did not marry her husband out of interest, after twenty years she is still with him.

*Angela* is also from Colombia; she is fifty six years old. She migrated thirty seven years ago to Curacao for employment. She married with a local man and they adopted a child together. However, recently her husband died in a car accident.

*Ana* is forty six years old. She is from the Dominican Republic. She migrated to Curacao to marry a local man. She had already one child from a previous marriage and she had a daughter with the local man in Curacao. Some years ago her husband died.

The Latinos in general are known as kind and hardworking. The locals argue Latinos work hard in Curaçao because they are in a foreign country and they need to work hard to be able to stay and support their families. The locals do not only see the Latinos but all immigrant groups as hardworking. Stereotypes are not only attributed to the Latinos in general but also to national groups in particular. Clear negative stereotypes exist towards the Dominicans and Colombians in Curaçao. The negative stereotyping towards the Dominicans and the Colombians can be explained because they are the largest groups of Latino immigrants. Because of the size of the immigrant groups, locals more often come in contact with Dominicans and Colombians than with smaller Latino groups. Therefore, they attribute more specific stereotypes to these groups while the smaller groups are lump together in the more general Latino category. Most immigrants from the Dominican Republic are perceived to be of a low socio-economic class and the Colombian immigrants are often associated with drugs and criminality. Positive

stereotypes also exist towards the Colombians and Venezuelans as they are known to be highly educated. Thus, the way Latinos are perceived by locals in Curaçao is paradoxical. On one side they are negatively stereotyped in relation to prostitution (Latinas), low socio-economic class (Dominicans), and drugs and criminality (Colombians). On the other side they are valued because of the beauty standard in the country (Latinas) and their high educational level (Colombians and Venezuelans).

During my talks with Raul from Venezuela, he told me a couple of times that:

‘The Antilleans only have two velocities: slow and slower’

The statement made by Raul illustrates that the local population is also stereotyped by the Latinos. The local population is negatively stereotyped as lazy, slow, closed, and picky in the work they do. They are also positively stereotyped as happy and following the rules. By stereotyping the local population the Latinos have a reference point to compare themselves with the locals and therefore give form to how they are and how they are not as an ethnic group and a national group in comparison to local population. Through the comparison with the locals the Latinos can more easily define their own group. This comparison is also used by those Latino immigrants who also identify with Curaçao. When they talk about them identifying with Curaçao they are likely to point out the similarities between their own group and the locals. An example often used by my Latino informants is that members of both groups are happy and spontaneous people. Thus, stereotyping influences the way in which Latinos give form and meaning to their identity as stereotypes are attributed to each group, and in doing so the boundaries between the Latinos and the locals are drawn, and sometimes crossed.

#### **4.2 Discrimination**

Negative stereotypes are often mentioned in relation to discrimination. The negative stereotyping of Latinas in Curaçao for instance leads to feelings of discrimination among several of my Latina informants. Discrimination is defined by Chrysochoou (2004: 36) as ‘treating a person or a group of people differently because of their membership to a particular social group’. In a multicultural society like Curaçao, people are concerned with the distribution of resources between groups. To reduce uncertainty, the dominant group attributes a higher status to the in-group and may discriminate against immigrants in order to

maintain a (symbolic) higher status (Chrysochoou 2004). Institutional as well as informal discrimination contribute to the disadvantages immigrants may experience in the host society.

Several of my Latino informants say there is discrimination towards Latinos in Curaçao. Among those who experience discrimination it is often argued that it is a discrimination of the Spanish language. They say that the locals highly appreciate the local language Papiamentu and discriminate against Spanish speaking immigrants. Many of my Latino informants have learned Papiamentu and speak Papiamentu with the local population, so, in this way they can avoid discrimination. Although most of my Latino informants speak Papiamentu to a certain extent, not all of them do. Some of them say they can manage easily with the Spanish language because the largest group of locals can speak and understand Spanish, and therefore they do not feel the need to learn Papiamentu. Others argue that they do not want to learn and speak Papiamentu because it will damage their Spanish. Rose Mary Allen (local) told me the local language Papiamentu is often perceived by Latinos to be a 'bad spoken Spanish' and therefore Latinos mostly do not want to learn Papiamentu.

Furthermore, the Latinos are a visible immigrants group related to employment as many of them work in the service branch: in shops, hotels and restaurants. It is argued by my local informants that many of them do not speak Papiamentu leading to tensions between the Latinos and the locals. The idea emerges among locals that they become strangers on their own island because they cannot speak in their own language in the shops, hotels and restaurants of their island. According to Leila and Vivian (locals) there are two groups of Latinos, those who try to speak Papiamentu and those who do not, and there are also two groups of locals, those who want the immigrant to speak Papiamentu and those who adapt themselves and speak Spanish to the Latin American immigrant. Thus, the language issue depends on the interaction between the Latino immigrants and the locals and discrimination can be felt on both sides: by those locals who argue the Latinos discriminate against the local language Papiamentu referring to it as a 'bad spoken Spanish' and by those Latinos who argued that the locals discriminate against the Spanish speaking immigrants.

In chapter three I discuss the importance of the concept '*Yu di Kòrsou*' for the identification of my Latino informants with the host society. Language is an important aspect in defining who is a '*Yu di Kòrsou*' and who is not. Benedict Anderson (2006) argues the importance of language in the process of imagining a nation. Papiamentu is often by scholars labeled as the core of Curaçao identity. The creole language does not have a stigma of inferiority. During colonial time Papiamentu was gradually accepted by all groups in Curaçao.

The creole language is an important means in drawing the lines between in-group and out-group as it distinguishes those who are '*Yu di Kòrsou*' and those who are not (Allen 2009). The importance of Papiamentu for the identity of the local community explains why many locals are so eager in that immigrants learn the local language. Many of my Latino informants speak Papiamentu to a certain extent, thus it can be expected that this increases their chances of acceptance in the host society. Indeed, Antonio from Peru for instance told me that people regularly ask him if he is a '*Yu di Kòrsou*' because he speaks Papiamentu so well. Yet, when Latinos speak Papiamentu they often have an accent, revealing their Latino identity. Most Latinos are therefore not seen as '*Yu di Kòrsou*' because they might speak Papiamentu, but not like a true '*Yu di Kòrsou*' does.

Moreover, most Latin American immigrants come to Curaçao to work and therefore competition between Latinos and locals takes place in the labor market (Allen et al. 2003). This competition leads to a common xenophobia in Curaçao as locals argue that the Latino immigrants come to Curaçao and take over their jobs and some of my Latino informants say the locals do not like Latinos who progress. Yet, this view is not shared by all locals as it is also argued that the Latinos in Curaçao are necessary because they do those low status jobs that the local population does not want to do, such as domestic work and construction.

Discrimination seems to be felt stronger by immigrants from the Dominican Republic and Colombia than by other Latin American immigrant groups. This difference can be explained by the view that the local population has towards the Latinos in general and the stereotypes they attribute to each group respectively. As argued above, the Dominicans and the Colombians are clearly stereotyped in a negative way, while no clear negative stereotypes are attributed to the Venezuelans or other smaller Latin American groups. This does not mean that immigrants from smaller Latino groups do not experience discrimination in Curaçao. Frida from Venezuela for instance told me she experienced discrimination in Curaçao. According to her this discrimination is related to the language, because when she learned Papiamentu she received much better treatment by locals. She also says that discrimination is related to the bad image Latinas have in Curaçao. The following quotation is illustrative:

'The Curaçaoans do not like the Latinos. That is why there is so much discrimination (...) that the Dominicans come to steal the husbands of the local women, that the Colombian women are crazy. And in 'Campo Alegre' only Colombian women work, they have a really bad reputation. And then they [the locals K vd S] generalize. But we are not all like that', so Frida says.

But Frida also told me that being a Latina from Venezuela works in her advantage and she experiences less discrimination when the locals know she comes from Venezuela:

‘When I say I am from Venezuela, than it is like they lower their guard a little’, so Frida says.

Thus, Latinos from the smaller groups may also experience discrimination but when locals became aware of their membership to a certain national group, such as the Venezuelans, their initial negative attitude may change in a more positive one.

Discrimination is an influential factor in whether immigrants feel at home in Curaçao or not. Nancy from Colombia for example already lives six years in Curaçao. Due to the discrimination she experiences Nancy does not feel accepted in Curaçao and therefore she does not feel at home. In the case of Nancy, discrimination plays an important role in why she does not feeling at home. However most of my Latino informants argue to feel at home in Curaçao even if they experienced some kind of discrimination. They say they are not affected by this discrimination and can still feel at home. Furthermore, for those Latinos who do not feel at home in Curaçao other reasons than discrimination seems to be more important, such as cultural differences and the absence of family and friends. The view the local population has toward the Latino immigrants can also influence feelings of belonging. Sandra for example migrated from the Dominican Republic to Curaçao twenty two years ago. She has lived most of her live on the island; she married to a local man and has two children, both born in Curaçao. Sandra wants to belong to Curaçao; however due to the discrimination she experiences she does not feel accepted by the local population.

Quite some of my Latino informants feel discrimination in Curaçao. Some of them are affected by it. Others do not feel affected by discrimination, they say it is just part of being in a foreign country and therefore they do not pay much attention to this issue. Although they feel discrimination in some occasions they can still feel at home in Curaçao, and they can feel part of the community. Furthermore, not all of my Latino informants feel discrimination in Curaçao. Several of my Latino informants feel well accepted by the locals and do not have problems related to negative stereotyping or discrimination. The problems they encounter in Curaçao, such as restrictions in employment, are not blamed on discrimination, as they could happen in their countries of origin as well, so they say. It is often argued in the literature that discrimination can lead to the grouping of immigrants with the same nationality and ethnicity in order to find mutual support (Baud et al. 1996; Castles 2000; Castles & Miller 2003). This

is mostly true for those of my Latino informants who feel affected by discrimination. But, ethnic and national grouping among Latinos in Curaçao does not only depend on discrimination. Most of my Latino informants who do not feel discriminated or say not to be affected by it, often group with members of their ethnic and national group in the host society.

### **4.3 Race and racialization**

'Race can be defined as the grouping of human beings based on the presumption and not reality that biological differences separate people into distinct populations' (Sanabria 2007: 110). It is scientifically proven that race is not based on biological foundation. But distinctions into races are still made, and racism persists. Therefore, race can be seen as a social construction (Castles 2000: 166; Sanabria 2007: 110). A great mixing of ethnicities has taken place over time in the Latin American and the Caribbean regions, but racism is not uncommon and can be attributed to the exaggerated valuation of 'whiteness' and a negative vision of Indians and blacks that started with the European colonizers and continued over time. In Latin America and the Caribbean racial structures are not rigid dividing people into 'black' or 'white' like in the United States. The racial systems are fluid, flexible, and situational, influenced by other cultural factors like education and social class (Sanabria 2007). However, this does not mean that racism does not exist, racial identities are still based on graduations in light and dark skin color and whites often continue to have disproportional social, political and economic influence (Barnov & Yelvington 2003: 211; Sanabria 2007).

Looking from the point of view of the Latinos who come from countries where racism against blacks is not uncommon, entering a society like Curaçao where the majority of the population is black and blacks occupy privileged positions in society might be disconcerting. Adriano, for example, told me that in Peru the blacks occupy the lowest position in society and are discriminated, for him it was surprising to see the difference in Curaçao and it took him some time to get used to the idea. Now that he has become religious he does not see the point of racism anymore because he believes all persons to be equal. Furthermore, the good experience with blacks in Curaçao also helped him change his initial point of view. As argued by some of my informants, Latinos might have racist feelings when coming to Curaçao which may lead to a reversed racism: of the minority group, the Latinos, towards the dominant group, the locals. Gustavo from Colombia told me in my interview with him that he could notice that some Latinos have racist feelings because they use racist expressions while referring to blacks. Nevertheless, these racist feelings are not really expressed by Latinos as

they encounter themselves in an ‘underdog’ position as foreigners in the host society. Latinos might have racist feelings but are not in the position to express these feelings in Curaçao.

Oostindie (2000: 123) argues that although the majority of the population in Curaçao is Afro-Antilleans or from mixed European and African descent, the ethnic discourses in Curaçao are still typified by a strong hierarchy of color and class, and differentiations based on color are still essential markers between groups. From this point of view it can be expected that Latinos in Curaçao experience a higher valuation due to their appearances. And indeed, Latinas are perceived to be pretty because of the existing beauty standard in Curaçao. According to Jane (local) this is related to an ‘inner racism’ the black population in Curaçao has. The high valuation of the phenotypical appearances of whites over time is still reflected in contemporary society in Curaçao. An example given by Jane is that in the local language Papiamentu ‘*mal kabei*’ (bad hair) means the same as cruse hair and ‘*bon kabei*’ (good hair) means straight hair. Those of my Latino informants who feel discriminated in Curaçao often blame this discrimination to the ‘inner racism’ the locals have. According to them the locals are frustrated because of the slavery past and envy the Latinos because of their appearances and therefore discriminate against them.

As time has passed, education and socio-economic position have increased in importance as markers of differentiation between groups in Curaçao (Oostindie 2000: 123). Therefore, Latino immigrants with a low education and socio-economic position still find themselves at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Francisco for example, is an immigrant from the Dominican Republic, who feels strongly discriminated. He works in construction and his socio-economic position is low. According to Francisco the locals discriminate against him because they perceive Latinos to be poor. Indeed, the general view locals I talked with in Curaçao have about Latinos is that they are poor and segmented in certain low status jobs like construction and domestic work.

#### **4.4 State policies**

State policies and attitudes towards immigrants influence one another mutually. Immigrants can be accepted and granted citizenship, but discriminatory policies may also exist (Chrysochoou 2004). It is also important to mention the influence state policies have on the consciousness of immigrants themselves. In those countries where immigrants are accepted as permanent settlers, are granted civil rights, and secure residence status, a long term perspective becomes possible. However, in those countries where immigrants are treated as temporary, immigrants settle in the host society but cannot plan a future as part of the wider society

(Castles & Miller 2003: 251-252). Most Latin American immigrants migrate to Curaçao for employment. Immigrants are allowed to stay in Curaçao permanently if they can find an employer willing to sign for the work permit. When the immigrant obtained a work permit he or she can apply for a residents permit. Initially the immigrant will need to renovate the work and residents permit every year, but after time, this becomes easier. Furthermore, immigrants in Curaçao can apply for the naturalization after several years of residence on the island. For those immigrants who do not naturalize in Curaçao, there are no obligatory integration requirements made by the state like there are in other countries such as the Netherlands. It is up to the immigrant if he or she wants to integrate or not.

All my Latino informants in Curaçao have a legal status, or even citizenship. Therefore, for them a long term perspective becomes possible in Curaçao. However, to obtain a secure residence permit is not always facilitated by the state. Several of my Latino informants feel institutional discrimination at the migration offices in Curaçao. They feel they are treated badly and difficulties are created for them when they want to obtain their residence permit. They say for example that the employees at the migration offices do not give them the necessary information or they give the information in Dutch, a language many Latinos in Curaçao do not manage. This makes my Latino informants feel rejected. Jimmy from Colombia told me the following about this subject during my interview with him:

‘If you are a Latino they see you as different at the migration offices. If the papers are ready they do not even check the computer, they just tell you the papers are not there yet’

An important concern for immigrants is often how to obtain citizenship and thus being formally equal to others in the nation-state. Citizenship influences the way in which immigrants adapt in the new society. Citizenship is defined by Chryssochoou (2004: xxiii) as ‘the legal membership of an organized political entity such as a nation-state. It concerns the relationship of the individual with the organization and includes the rights and duties of the citizen and his/her expectations from the organization (protection, welfare, etc.)’. Latin American immigrants in Curaçao can become naturalized Dutch citizens. In order for immigrants to naturalize they need to fulfill certain requirements (see text box 6). Discrimination towards Latinos at state institution may slow down the process of naturalization of Latinos in Curaçao. Due to discrimination at the migration offices it may take them some time to fulfill the requirements for the naturalization.

During my interview with Mr. Coffie, the coordinator of the naturalization process in Curaçao, he told me that those immigrants who want to become naturalized Dutch need to resign to their own nationality. This requirement was always made to the immigrants who wanted to naturalize, but was not enforced. Since 2003 immigrants actually need to resign to their nationality.<sup>4</sup> This policy is established by the Netherlands to avoid abuse of the double nationality, so Mr. Coffie argues.

This policy influences the identity of Latin American immigrants in Curaçao. An example is Sofia; she is from Colombia and married to a local man for already sixteen years. She did the naturalization exams and passed. Therefore, she is entitled to apply for the Dutch nationality, but she refused:

‘I do not want it. In order to obtain the Dutch passport I have to resign to the Colombian nationality. That implies that I would not have a Colombian passport or Colombian documentation, and I am very nationalistic’, so Sofia told me.

Several of my Latino informants have opted for the Dutch naturalization anyways, or plan to do so in the future. Most of those who naturalized argue that they did so for the privileges that having a Dutch passport

#### **Text box 6: The naturalization process**

In order to naturalize the immigrant in Curacao needs to meet certain requirements. Firstly, the immigrant needs to have a resident's permit. The required time of the permit depends on the status of the immigrant, for those who are married to a Dutch the required time is three years consecutively. For those who are not married to a Dutch the required time is five years consecutively. Secondly, the immigrants need to prove they are well integrated in society by taken an integration exam. The exam consists of two parts, a language part testing the knowledge of Papiamentu or Dutch (reading, writing, speaking, and listening), and a society part consisting of knowledge about issues as politics, education, laws, and taxes. For the application the immigrant pays 1400 florins, for the exam another 500 florins. If the immigrant passes the exam he or she can apply for the Dutch passport. Integration courses are offered by organizations, independent from the government. The immigrant needs to pay for these courses. The courses consist of three months studying the language and the society of Curacao. But not all immigrants do this integration courses, some just study on their own.

In the past it was easier for immigrants to obtain the Dutch nationality, after 1985 an oral exam was introduced in which it was decided whether the immigrant could obtain the passport. Since 2007 the naturalization exam was introduced to give every immigrant equal chances and to avoid abuses of the passport. Immigrants who live in Curacao for more than ten years are offered an option. This means that the immigrants are given the option to naturalize with less strict requirements because it is assumed the immigrants are well integrated into society after more than ten years on the island.

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<sup>4</sup> When the immigrant can prove to suffer from great economic loses when resigning to his or her nationality, an exception can be made. Yet, the immigrant needs to do everything possible to resign to his or her nationally, so Mr. Coffie explained to me.

provides them. Although they have become naturalized Dutch they feel no connectedness with this nationality, it is just practical to have the Dutch passport. Only a few of my Latino informants say that they feel part of the community of Curaçao because they have the Dutch passport. Furthermore, several of my Latino informants feel part of the community of Curaçao with or without the Dutch nationality; they say to be part of the community because they contribute to the community economically and with their knowledge, and besides they pay their taxes. On one side, when my Latino informants talk about being part of the community of Curaçao, their emphasis lays on the civic conceptualization of the nation-state: they contribute to the community and they pay their taxes. On the other side, when they talk about their connectedness with their country of origin their emphasis lay on their feelings, blood lines, and roots.

My research has focused on legal Latino immigrants in Curaçao. Even so, it is important to elaborate upon the discussion of illegal Latin American immigrants in Curaçao. Many Latin American immigrants, especially from Colombia and the Dominican Republic, have entered and settled in Curaçao on an illegal basis; influencing the view the local population and the state have of the Latinos in Curaçao. Latinos are often associated with illegality, leading to tensions with the local population. As I was told by Mr. Nisbet, the head of the migration office in Curaçao, the locals have no problems with immigrants who follow the rules and stay on a legal basis, but they do express their discontent in relation to illegal immigrants. In the past, projects have been started by the state in order to regulate the illegal immigrants in Curaçao. In 2001 thousands of immigrants obtained legal status in Curaçao, as part of a legalization program (Goede 2008). But in the present, the country is still struggling to cope with the illegal population. Recently the state of Curaçao came with a new project, the 'Brooks Tower'. This project gave immigrants who fulfilled certain requirements the chance to become legal residents.

To conclude, the way in which Latinos are perceived by the local population is paradoxical. There is negative but also positive stereotyping of Latinos in Curaçao. Several of my Latino informants experience discrimination, but not all of them do. Some feel affected by discrimination, others do not. Racism towards Latinos in Curaçao does not take place, but education and socio-economic class are also important group markers. Therefore, Latinos who belong to a low socio-economic class can still find themselves at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Furthermore, among my Latino informants there are some feelings of non-acceptance by state institutions. Nevertheless, all my Latino informants are legal residents or

even citizens and for that reason a long term perspective becomes possible for them in Curaçao. Latinos may encounter some problems in the host society related to negative stereotyping, discrimination and state policies. But it can be argued that the hostility towards them is not very strong in Curaçao, as they are perceived in positive ways too.

## Conclusion

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The focus of this thesis has been on the way in which Latin American immigrants give form and meaning to their identity in Curaçao. I have analysed different aspects of the social identity of immigrants. Social identity refers to the classification of people into social categories. I have approached identity in a constructionist way. I consider identity as multiple and changeable and the importance of certain identities may vary in different contexts. Yet, I have also shown that there are some restrictions to the construction and changeability of identity. Identity does not only depend on self-definitions but may also be ascribed to the person by others, and past events and broader historical circumstances influence the identity process (Ericksen 2002; Ghorashi 2001; Verkuyten 2005). The central question I have meant to answer in this thesis is the following: how do Latino immigrants give form and meaning to their identity in Curaçao and what are the social conflicts - like negative stereotyping, discrimination and racism - that affect this identification? I have analyzed the ethnic identity, the national identity and the identification of Latin American immigrants with the host society. These different identities are not fragmented; rather they are interrelated.

As argued by Ericksen (2002), ethnic identity is not only a process of self-identification but also of identities ascribed by others. Latinos in Curaçao see themselves as culturally different from the local population and as culturally similar to other Latin American immigrants, and are also perceived as such by the locals. The ethnic identity is based on several cultural characteristics and practices the Latinos believe to have in common with one another and which they consider different from the locals, such as the way in which they treat people, the Spanish language, music, food, clothing and values. These characteristics create a feeling of togetherness between the Latinos. The Latino identity is expressed in the host society and ethnic networks have emerged. In Curaçao, the Latin American identity is reinforced and is molded into a Latino ethnic category encircling various national groups. Yet, this does not mean that differences between national groups of Latinos are not made. In Curaçao my Latino informants articulate their ethnic identity alongside their national identity.

In their countries of origin Latino immigrants learned to love and respect their country. This national identity is a frame of reference for their identity formation that does not disappear in a new country, showing that identity is not only changeable but also has some continuity with the past. The strong national identity of my Latino informants is reflected in their feelings of belonging to their nation-state and feelings of togetherness with their national group. Food and drinks, music and dance, sports, clothing and speech style are cultural

elements addressed by my Latino informants in Curaçao as important aspects of their national identities. These cultural elements overlap to a great extent with the cultural components of their ethnic identity; they create similarities between Latinos but at the same time they draw the lines between national groups.

To maintain their national identity, Latin American immigrants in Curaçao often turn to their national groups. Group forming becomes evident in Curaçao in the way in which Latinos have organized themselves on the island, as they have done so through national lines. Strong national networks have emerged and national identities are expressed in the host society during cultural, social and educative activities and gatherings. The strong connections Latino immigrants in Curaçao feel with their countries of origin are also expressed in the transnational practices in which they engage. Latino immigrants in Curaçao sustain social relations along family, economic, political, medical care and religious lines, linking the host society with their countries of origin and other parts of the world. Most of my Latino informants can be argued to be what Glick-Schiller and Fouron (1999: 344) call 'transmigrants', since almost all of them maintain close ties with their country of origin, but are also involved in new relationships in the host society.

The multiplicity of identity shows in the identification of my Latino informants with the host society. Their ethnic and national identity does not impede them to also identify with Curaçao. The identification of my Latino informants with the host society is referred to as them feeling part of the community and often depends on the situation. Identifying with the host society is related to Latino immigrants feeling at home in Curaçao. Most of my Latino informants see home in a diasporic way, as where they feel safe and comfortable and therefore many of them feel at home in Curaçao. Their feelings of belonging are more often connected to their countries of origin. Nevertheless, several of my Latino informants feel a strong connection with their country of origin as well as with Curaçao. Therefore, it is not surprising that integration is the most common acculturation strategy among my Latino informants.

The identity formation of immigrants is influenced by the way in which they are perceived in the host society. The way in which Latinos are perceived in Curaçao is paradoxical; they are negatively as well as positively stereotyped. The Latinos also negatively and positively stereotype the local population. Stereotyping influences the way in which Latinos define their identity as stereotypes are attributed to each group, and in doing so the boundaries between the Latinos and the locals are drawn and sometimes crossed. Negative stereotyping may lead

to discrimination. Quite some, but not all, of my Latino informants in Curaçao experience discrimination. Some of them say to be affected by it, others do not. Discrimination can influence the feeling of home and belonging of my Latino informants, but discrimination is not always the explanatory factor. Racism towards Latinos in Curaçao does not exist; on the contrary, Latinos in Curaçao may experience a higher valuation due to their phenotypical appearances. But, education and social class are also important factor defining the position of a person in Curaçao. Those Latinos who belong to a low socio-economic class can still find themselves at the bottom of the social hierarchy in Curaçao.

State policies are also important in the perceptions of immigrants in the host society. Among my Latino informants there are some feelings of non-acceptance from state institutions. Yet, due to their legal status, sometimes even citizenship, a long term perspective becomes possible in Curaçao. By the state, no integration requirements are made to immigrants who do not naturalize. Hence, it can be argued that the way in which Latinos in Curaçao are perceived is positive as well as negative. Latinos may encounter problems related to negative stereotyping, discrimination and state policies, but they are not excluded in Curaçao. However, the treatment of illegal Latino immigrants may be different from the treatment legal Latinos receive in Curaçao. Therefore, the identity formation of illegal Latino immigrants in Curaçao is an interesting subject for a follow up research.

Thus, Latino immigrants in Curaçao identify ethnically, nationally and with the host society, showing that identity is multiple and layered. A variety of factors influence the identity formation of Latinos in Curaçao: their affection with the ethnic cultural elements and practices, their attachment to their nation-state and national group, their feelings of home and belonging, and the way in which they are perceived by the host society. Latinos in Curaçao do not isolate themselves as ethnic and national groups. Although Latinos may encounter some problems with negative stereotyping, discrimination and state policies, they are not excluded by the local community. The environment in which they settle appears to be to some extent open and dynamic rather than hostile. This gives Latinos the opportunity to integrate in the host society.

This thesis has provided new insights into contemporary debates of identity formation. It shows that migration can lead to the forming of new ethnic identities, such as is the case with the Latinos in Curaçao, and that the force of national identity does not disappear due to migration to another country. It also shows that by using the multiplicity of identity people have developed flexible ways to deal with the changes that migration brings along. The to

some extent open and dynamic society in which Latinos have settled, makes it possible for Latino immigrants in Curaçao to combine their own collective ethnic and national identity with new social relationships and identifications with the host society.

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## Appendix 1: Tables of migration

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| Year | Immigration | Emigration |
|------|-------------|------------|
| 2000 | 3833        | 13804      |
| 2001 | 4198        | 9323       |
| 2002 | 8441        | 6304       |
| 2003 | 7712        | 4804       |
| 2004 | 5918        | 3952       |
| 2005 | 6392        | 3909       |
| 2006 | 6144        | 4112       |
| 2007 | 5726        | 4587       |
| 2008 | 5212        | 5032       |

|                    | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 |
|--------------------|------|------|------|
| Total              | 6392 | 6149 | 5736 |
| Netherlands        | 4364 | 3943 | 3582 |
| Dominican Republic | 270  | 380  | 322  |
| Colombia           | 322  | 307  | 297  |
| Aruba              | 86   | 97   | 128  |
| Venezuela          | 198  | 159  | 123  |
| China              | 96   | 114  | 118  |

| Country of origin  | Gender |      | Total |
|--------------------|--------|------|-------|
|                    | M      | F    |       |
| Argentina          | 30     | 32   | 62    |
| Bolivia            | 2      | 5    | 7     |
| Chile              | 30     | 26   | 56    |
| Colombia           | 2176   | 3836 | 6012  |
| Costa Rica         | 26     | 44   | 70    |
| Cuba               | 142    | 135  | 277   |
| Dominican Republic | 1731   | 5566 | 7297  |
| Ecuador            | 19     | 38   | 57    |
| El Salvador        | 3      | 5    | 8     |
| Mexico             | 18     | 30   | 48    |
| Panama             | 17     | 30   | 47    |
| Paraguay           | 4      | 3    | 7     |
| Peru               | 65     | 69   | 134   |
| Puerto Rico        | 16     | 29   | 45    |
| Venezuela          | 1108   | 1217 | 2325  |

<sup>5</sup> Central Bureau for Statistics Dutch Antilles.

<sup>6</sup> Central Bureau for Statistics Dutch Antilles.

<sup>7</sup> Numbers obtained at the civic registration in Curacao.

| <b>Table IV: Migration to Curaçao by major sending Latino countries<sup>8</sup></b> |                 |                           |                  |              |
|---|-----------------|---------------------------|------------------|--------------|
| <b>Year</b>   | <b>Colombia</b> | <b>Dominican Republic</b> | <b>Venezuela</b> | <b>Total</b> |
| 1995  | 86              | 138                       | 42               | 266          |
| 1996  | 130             | 279                       | 80               | 489          |
| 1997  | 151             | 342                       | 73               | 566          |
| 1998  | 132             | 277                       | 73               | 482          |
| 1999  | 139             | 276                       | 68               | 483          |
| 2000  | 225             | 249                       | 66               | 540          |
| 2001  | 340             | 263                       | 113              | 716          |
| 2002  | 1179            | 693                       | 166              | 2038         |
| 2003  | 878             | 475                       | 204              | 1557         |
| 2004  | 288             | 156                       | 141              | 585          |
| 2005  | 298             | 264                       | 152              | 714          |
| 2006  | 292             | 393                       | 134              | 819          |
| 2007  | 308             | 326                       | 105              | 739          |
| 2008  | 276             | 231                       | 100              | 607          |
| 2009  | 174             | 134                       | 146              | 454          |
| 2010  | 483             | 424                       | 78               | 985          |
| Un-known  | 24              | 86                        | 59               | 169          |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>6109</b>     | <b>7369</b>               | <b>2341</b>      | <b>15819</b> |

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<sup>8</sup> Numbers obtained at the civic registration in Curacao.

## **Appendix 2: General description of interviewed informants**

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Below a description is given of the Latinos I interviewed in Curaçao. Age, country of origin, time living in Curaçao, reason of migration, employment, and legal status are described for each one of them. Furthermore, an overview is provided of the locals I interviewed in Curaçao and the reasons why I interviewed them.

### **Interviewed Latinos:**

*Raul* (31 years old)

Raul is from Venezuela. He migrated to Curaçao six years ago because of political and economic reasons. He works at a Venezuelan bank, and he is a legal resident.

*Luis* (55 years old)

Luis is a Venezuelan immigrant. He left his home country six years ago because of political and employment reasons. Firstly Luis migrated alone. After one year in Curaçao, his wife and youngest son also came to the island. The rest of Luis's family still lives in Venezuela. He works as an engineer at a petroleum company and is a legal resident.

*Pedro* (20 years old)

Pedro is also from Venezuela; he lives four years in Curaçao. He left Venezuela because he had family in Curaçao and liked living on the island. He is a student and works at a Venezuelan bank. Pedro is a legal resident and has the Dutch passport.

*Miguel* (29 years old)

Miguel is from Venezuela as well. He works at the same bank as Pedro and Raul. He lived in Curaçao from 1995 until 1999 when he went to the Netherlands, now he lives in Curaçao since 2005. He migrated to Curaçao because of the work of his father. He is a legal resident and in the naturalization process at the moment.

*Amaya* (41 years old)

Amaya is from Venezuela, she migrated twenty seven years ago to Curaçao in order to study, however, once in Curaçao she decided not to study but to work. Now she works at the Venezuelan consulate. She is a legal resident and has the Dutch passport.

*Frida* (28 years old)

Frida is from Venezuela. She lives already fourteen years in Curaçao; the reasons why she migrated are varied: family, politics, and better economic opportunities. She has her own clothing shop. She is a legal resident.

*Miguel T.* (30 years old)

Miguel T. is also from Venezuela. He migrated eight months ago to Curaçao because of the illness of his father who lives on the island. He works at the Venezuelan bank and is a legal resident.

*Emilia* (43 years old)

Emilia is from Venezuela. She migrated twenty seven years ago to Curaçao because of better economic opportunities. She works at the Venezuelan consulate. She is a legal resident and applying at the moment for the Dutch passport.

*Carla* (55 years old)

Carla is from Colombia. Carla migrated twenty years ago to Curaçao after her daughter died and she did not want to stay in Colombia. During her trips to Curaçao she had already known her future husband, a local Dutch. She works now for the group '*Folklore de Colombia*'. She is a legal resident and has the Dutch passport.

*Sofia* (50 years old)

Sofia is from Colombia. The reason she migrated to Curaçao sixteen years ago was to find better employment opportunities. She has now her own barbershop and also does some work for the group '*Folklore de Colombia*'. She is a legal resident in Curaçao.

*Nancy* (21 years old)

Nancy comes from Colombia; she migrated to Curaçao approximately six years ago because her mother was already living on the island because of employment reasons. She is a student and works at the internet café of her mother. She is a legal resident and has the Dutch passport.

*Ana C. (49 years old)*

Ana C. is from Colombia. She migrated thirty years ago to Curaçao married to a local man. She works for the '*Fundación Meca*' and she has her own radio program: '*Encuentro Colombiano*'. She is a legal resident and has the Dutch passport.

*Christian (33 years old)*

Christian is an immigrant from Colombia. Christian migrated eight years ago to Curaçao with the intention to stay for a while with his sister and then continue his migratory journey to Spain. However, he decided to stay in Curaçao. Christian works at a television station and is international football arbiter. He is a legal resident and he is in the process of becoming a naturalized Dutch.

*Isabela (51 years old)*

Isabela comes from Colombia. She migrated to Curaçao nine years ago for better economic opportunities and has worked in family houses since then. She is a legal resident.

*Bernaldo (52 years old)*

Bernardo is from Colombia. He migrated eight months ago to Curaçao for economic reasons. He works at a bakery. He is still waiting for his residence permit.

*Jimmy (50 years old)*

Jimmy is from Colombia. He migrated eleven years ago to Curaçao because of employment opportunities on the island. Jimmy works at the island's oil refinery. He is a legal resident.

*Angela (56 years old)*

Angela is also from Colombia. She migrated thirty seven years ago to Curaçao for employment. She married with a local man. Her work is the sewing of clothing. She is a legal resident and has the Dutch passport.

*Maria (48 years old)*

Maria migrated from Colombia to Curaçao forty years ago. She works as a secretary at a high school. She is a legal resident and has the Dutch passport.

*Gabriela (64 years old)*

Gabriela is from Colombia. Gabriela migrated from Colombia to Curaçao almost thirty nine years ago. It all started when a Colombian friend asked Gabriela to visit her in Curaçao. She went to Curaçao and stayed for a while, around four months. During her time on the island she fell in love with a local man. Although in love with a local, Gabriela decided to return to Colombia because she missed her family. But the man was also in love with her and he followed her to Colombia. They got married in Colombia and migrated back to Curaçao. She is a legal resident and a naturalized Dutch.

*Rosita* (36 years old)

Rosita is from Colombia. She migrated to Curaçao ten years ago because of employment. She works in a tourist office and is a legal resident. She is one of the founding members of the '*Club de Damas Hispanas*' in Curaçao.

*Gustavo* (34 year old)

Gustavo is an immigrant from Colombia. He migrated ten years ago to Curaçao because of his religious beliefs. He is pastor at an Evangelic Church in Curaçao where Spanish is spoken and most members are Latinos. He is a legal resident and a naturalized Dutch.

*Delia* (33 years old)

Delia is from the Dominican Republic. She migrated ten years ago to Curaçao. Firstly to visit a friend, but she stayed illegal to work for about one year. After one year migration services send her back home, however a local man went to the Dominican Republic and married her there, after the marriage she and her husband returned to Curaçao. Delia works at a clothing shop and is the leader of the group '*Caribbean Tropical*', and is now a legal resident.

*Francisco* (44 years old)

Francisco is from the Dominican Republic. One of his sisters, who lives in Curaçao, invited Francisco to come to the island. Francisco works in the construction sector and due to better employment opportunities in Curaçao he decided to accept his sister's invitation. He migrated to Curaçao in three occasions. In 1990 Francisco entered Curaçao for the first time and stayed six months. In 1991 he entered again and stayed only one month because of problems with the migration offices. In 1996 Francisco decided to try his luck one more time. Francisco stayed in Curaçao illegally for quite some time. By now, after fourteen consecutive years on the island, he finally has his residents permit.

*Santiago* (26 years old)

Santiago is from the Dominican Republic. He migrated to Curaçao at the age of seven because his mother married a local man. However they migrated back to the Dominican Republic and five years ago once again to Curaçao. He is a student at the University of Curaçao. He is a legal resident and he also is in possession of the Dutch passport.

*Ana* (46 years old)

Ana is from the Dominican Republic and the mother of Santiago. She migrated to Curaçao to marry. She is a house wife. She is a legal resident and also has the Dutch passport.

*Sandra* (42 years old)

Sandra is from the Dominican Republic. She migrated to Curaçao thirteen years ago because her mother married with a local. She has her own barbershop. She is a legal resident and in possession of the Dutch passport.

*Geronimo* (33 years old)

Geronimo is from the Dominican Republic. He migrated ten years ago to Curaçao for employment. He is an electronic engineer and the public speaker of the '*Asociación de Dominicanos Unidos en Curazao*' and the director of the television program '*Lideres Unidos*'. Geronimo is a legal resident and a naturalized Dutch.

*Fernando* (65 years old)

Fernando is from the Dominican Republic. He migrated to Curaçao in 1990 for better employment opportunities. He has his own printers shop and is the director of the '*Asociación de Dominicanos Unidos en Curazao*'. He is a legal resident.

*Lucia* (47 years old)

Lucia is from the Dominican Republic. She migrated twenty four years ago to Curaçao for better economic opportunities. She has her own barbershop. Lucia is a legal resident and a naturalized Dutch.

*José Miguel* (42 years old)

José Miguel is from Cuba. He migrated to Curaçao twelve years ago as a political exile. He is a journalist working for 'La Brújula' one of the newspapers in Spanish. He is a legal resident.

*Juanita* (33 years old)

Juanita is also from Cuba. She migrated to Curaçao sixteen years ago because she fell in love with a local. She is a Spanish teacher, a legal resident and a naturalized Dutch.

*Daniel* (42 years old)

Daniel is from Cuba as well. He migrated to Curaçao almost three years ago for better employment opportunities. He works as a plumber and also does activities for the Latino Adventist church. He is a legal resident.

*Adriano* (32 years old)

Adriano is from Peru. He migrate to Curaçao eight years ago for better employment opportunities, he works in mechanics. After six years of illegality in Curaçao he now obtained the residents permit.

*Antonio* (48 years old)

Antonio is also from Peru. After living twenty years in Venezuela, Antonio migrated eleven years ago to Curaçao for better employment opportunities. He works as a graphic designer. Antonio is also the president of the Peruvian association in Curaçao. He is a legal resident.

*Lorena* (27 years old)

Lorena is from Puerto Rico. She migrated one year ago to Curaçao together with her husband Joshua who is from the island. She works for a company in Puerto Rico transcribing records. She is a legal resident.

*Ariana* (65 years old)

Ariana is from El Salvador. She migrated forty years ago to marry a local man. She has an insect combating company. She is a legal resident and has the Dutch passport.

I also interviewed people at the consulates of the Dominican Republic, Colombia and Venezuela in Curaçao.

## **Interviewed locals**

*Rose Marry Allen:*

Rose Marry Allen works at the anthropological museum of the Netherlands Antilles (NAAM).

*Professor Valdemar Marcha:*

Professor Valdemar Marcha has special knowledge of the history of Curaçao and relations between ethnic groups.

*Christine:*

Christine works at the '*Kas di Kultura*' in Curaçao.

*Jane:*

Jane works at the museum '*Tula*' in Curaçao and has a gender and history background.

*Omar and Jeanette:*

Omar and Jeanette come in contact with Latinos due to their work in education.

*Mr. Coffie:*

Mr. Coffie is the head of the Justice office in Curaçao and the coordinator of the naturalization process.

*Mr. Nisbet:*

Mr. Nisbet is the head of the migration office in Curaçao.

*Joshua:*

Joshua is married to Lorena from Puerto Rico.

*Edward:*

Edward participates in the group of Colombian folklore in Curaçao.

*Aresh:*

Aresh works as a fly attendant and comes in contact with Latinos in his daily live.

*Leila and Vivian* (sisters):

Leila and Vivian come into contact with Latinos due to their family and friends and in their neighborhood.