



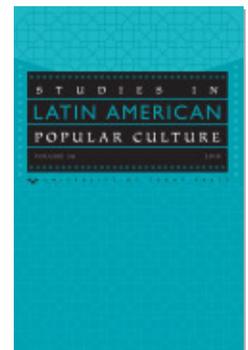
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From Papiamentu to Afro-Catholic Brotherhoods: An Interdisciplinary Analysis of Iberian Elements in Curaçaoan Popular Culture

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Abstract

This article intends to show that a search for traces of Iberian influence on popular culture can also be productive in parts of the Americas that have a British, Dutch, French, or Danish colonial past. It does so by analyzing the cultural identity formation among the black population of the Antillean island of Curaçao, with a specific focus on Catholicism and Papiamentu. Few languages have generated more discussion among Creolists than Papiamentu, a language of Iberian parenthood spoken on an island with a Dutch colonial history starting in 1634. Strangely enough, religion and popular culture have received little attention, so far, in the discussion on the genesis of Papiamentu. Using research results from the field of linguistics on the influence of the Portuguese-based Creole of the Cape Verde islands on Papiamentu, this article argues that Afro-Iberian elements influenced the development not only of Curaçao's language but also of its cultural identity, and that Afro-Catholic mutual-aid and burial societies may have facilitated the transmission of that generation's key identity markers, including its language, to later generations.

Scholars interested in the influence of Iberian traditions on popular culture in the Americas are naturally inclined to focus on areas located in today's Latin America. As I show in this article, however, the search for traces of Iberian influence on popular culture can also be productive in parts of the Americas that have a British, Dutch, French, or Danish colonial past. The case study I present here is that of the Antillean island of Curaçao. Despite having been conquered by the Dutch in the early seventeenth century, the Iberian influence on black popular culture on the island remained strong, most notably in the Creole language Papiamentu.

Few languages have generated more discussion among Creolists than Papiamentu, a language of Iberian parenthood spoken on an island with a Dutch colonial history dating to 1634. It is generally assumed that Papiamentu developed in the mid-seventeenth century among the slave population in Curaçao and later transitioned to the sparsely populated islands of Bonaire and Aruba (where the language is known as Papiamentu). Most of the research on the origins of Papiamentu focused on the question of whether the language originally derived from Portuguese or Spanish and on how these Iberian languages may have reached the island's charter generation. Another often-debated question is the role of Curaçao's Spanish- and/or Portuguese-speaking Sephardic Jewish community in the development of the Creole language.

Strangely enough, religion and popular culture have received little attention, so far, in the discussion on the genesis of Papiamentu and its transmission to later generations. This is all the more surprising considering that Curaçao is exceptional not only because the island's slave community developed a language that was different from that of its masters but also because those groups were of different religions. While the latter were either members of the Dutch Reformed Church or the Jewish community, the former were almost entirely Catholic.

Unfortunately, few historical data are available on Curaçao's charter generation. After the first Dutch West India Company (WIC) went bankrupt in 1674, many of its documents were lost. While there exists substantial documentation of slave-trading operations by the second WIC, established in 1675, the data do not provide information on slave populations that arrived in Curaçao in earlier decades. In the absence of substantial documentary evidence on the island's earliest slave community, any interpretation of the cultural, religious, and linguistic identity of Curaçao's charter generation remains speculative to a certain degree.

One way to deal with this challenge is by using a comparative methodology. Naturally, the observation that a similar practice existed in more than one place does not automatically imply that the origin and historical development of one corresponds to that of the other. Yet as results obtained by linguists who used a comparative methodology in their analysis of Papiamentu show, such an approach can add new perspectives that stimulate further research, also in other fields.

A case in point is the authoritative study by Jacobs (2012) that revealed an abundance of parallels between Papiamentu and the Portuguese-based Creole spoken on the Cape Verde islands and in nearby Guinea-Bissau and Casamance, which led the author to conclude that the island's charter generation must have originated predominantly from Upper Guinea and must have communicated in a Portuguese-based Creole. Considering that, after 1677, slaves sent to Curaçao came almost exclusively from Kwa- and Bantu-speaking areas in Africa, Jacobs is convinced that the "very first to populate the island" were crucial in the "formation of Papiamentu" (316).

Building on Jacobs's theory, I show that Afro-Iberian elements influenced the development not only of Curaçao's Creole language but also many of its religious and cultural (popular) traditions. Considering the proximity of the Spanish-controlled mainland and the strategic location of seventeenth-century Curaçao between New Netherland (1614–1664) in the north and Dutch Brazil (1630–1654) in the south, I occasionally extend my comparative perspective from the Cape Verde Islands to Latin America (mainly Venezuela) and these other two early-seventeenth-century Dutch Atlantic possessions.

Taking into consideration that the Cape Verde Islands were the first place in West Africa where Catholic brotherhoods were established, I pay special attention to the influence on Curaçaoan popular culture of mutual-aid and burial societies, known in Latin America as *irmandades* or *hermandades* or *confrarias* or *cofradías*. While Latin Americanists such as Howard (1998), Kiddy (2005), and Von Germeten (2006) have emphasized the crucial importance of such societies for the cultural identity formation of black communities in Latin America, it has been generally assumed that in parts of the Americas ruled by the French, English, Dutch, and Danish there was no space for the development of such black fraternal organizations. This view has been questioned by Dewulf (2017, 124–32), and also Cañizares-Esguerra, Childs, and Sidbury (2013, 9) have argued that “approved institutional structures . . . were not always necessary for Africans and their descendants to build fraternal structures.” I therefore raise the question of whether mutual-aid and burial societies similar to those we encounter on the Cape Verde Islands may also have existed in Curaçao, and, if so, how those societies influenced black identity formation on the island and facilitated the transmission of the charter generation's key identity markers, including its language, to later generations.

Historical Data on Curaçao's Charter Generation

Following the Dutch conquest of Curaçao in 1634, the island's approximately thirty-two Spanish residents were deported to the Spanish-controlled mainland. The same happened with the approximately five hundred Native Americans, only seventy-five of whom were kept on the island as laborers. Dutch documents do not refer to any blacks on the island (De Laet 1931–1937, 4:101–4). This is surprising considering that several documents mention the presence of blacks during the Spanish era. For instance, in 1565, the privateer John Hawkins sold slaves from Senegambia and Sierra Leone in Curaçao. In 1568, John Lovell and later, again, Hawkins brought more slaves to the island. Considering the lack of provisions, it is likely that most, if not all, of these slaves were quickly sold on the nearby mainland. This assumption corresponds to a document from 1612 reporting on the sale of slaves in Coro (Venezuela) who had been brought to Curaçao on a Portuguese ship.

A document from 1569 referring to a black man named Pedro confirms, in any case, that the population of Curaçao during the Spanish era did not consist exclusively of whites and Natives (Rupert 2012, 17, 27, 63). We can only speculate about the apparent absence of blacks on the island at the time of the Dutch conquest. One could hypothesize that some mulattoes may have been among the thirty-two “Spaniards” on the island, or that slaves managed to take advantage of the chaos to flee following the Dutch invasion, similar to what had occurred during the Dutch assault on Pernambuco, Brazil, in 1630. Research by Rupert (2012, 97) revealed, indeed, that escapes by slaves from the island were frequent and that, near Coro, a Maroon community composed of runaway slaves from Curaçao existed.

Following the Dutch conquest, Curaçao’s first director, Johan van Walbeeck, suggested that the company directors Lords XIX develop the island with the help of “blacks from Angola” (1634/1937, 305). Despite the fact that the WIC board of directors thereupon stipulated that all slaves captured on Iberian vessels in the Caribbean had to be taken to Curaçao going forward, there are no indications that the order had an immediate effect. The first population figure, from October 1635, lists fifty Natives and 412 Europeans, but not a single African. This is surprising because documents in the Archivo General de Indias from 1635 refer to two mulattoes, Diego de los Reyes and Juan Juanes, in Dutch service, as well as to a “little Negro” who had been on an Iberian ship conquered by the Dutch fleet on its way to Curaçao. While the slaves onboard that ship were left behind, the Dutch did take this one boy with them to Curaçao, where he served them as drummer (Wright 1934–1935, 1:204, 390–93).

In February 1637, Cornelis Jol conquered another Spanish ship in the region and brought the three blacks onboard to Curaçao (De Laet 1931–1937, 4:266). The instructions given in 1638 to Van Walbeeck’s successor, Jacob Pietersz Tolck, include a reference to the black slave population, which could be interpreted as a sign that more than three enslaved Africans had meanwhile arrived in Curaçao (Schiltkamp and De Smidt 1978, 1:3–10). Hartog’s (1961, 1:199) claim that no more than nine African slaves lived on the island by 1639 seems low considering that in the late 1630s, we already find references to Curaçao as a place where slaves were traded. In 1638, for instance, the WIC sent the ship *De Hoop* from Manhattan in New Netherland to Curaçao to fetch “cattle, salt or slaves” (Eekhof 1913, 2:150). One year later, Frederik Roeberge requested that the Chamber of Zealand reconsider WIC policy stipulating that all slaves taken to Curaçao be sold to the company and obtained authorization to purchase twenty-five of these slaves for his plantation on the island of St. Christopher—today’s St. Kitts (Hamelberg 1901, 48–49).

Data from 1643 show that the WIC had at that time about forty slaves at its disposal for labor in the company gardens in Curaçao and the salt pans on the nearby island of Bonaire (Gehring and Schiltkamp 1987, 23). Since the

Chamber of Zeeland had passed a resolution in 1641 requiring all its captains to take slaves captured in the Caribbean to Curaçao, these forty slaves had most likely been captured on Iberian vessels (Hamelberg 1901, 48). In fact, for both 1652 and 1656, there are data on Dutch privateers bringing to Curaçao an unknown number of slaves they confiscated from Portuguese vessels (Binder 1976, 45; Klooster 1998, 108).

In 1645, Petrus Stuyvesant, who had ruled Curaçao from 1642 until 1644, was appointed director general of New Netherland and the Dutch Caribbean possessions. The following year, we observe a connection between Manhattan and the Dutch Caribbean when a slave called Jan Creoly was arrested for child abuse in New Netherland and confessed to previous acts while living in Curaçao (Van Laer 1974, 4:326–28). We also note a connection when, in 1652, a group of forty-four slaves on their way from Spanish-held Jamaica to Cuba on the ship *San Antonio* were captured by a privateer and sold in New Netherland. The Spanish captain Juan Gallardo Ferrera later traveled to New Amsterdam and tried to get his slaves back. An investigation revealed that thirty-three of Gallardo's slaves were still living in New Netherland in 1656, but four of them, namely, "Lucia and her husband, called Joseph" and "Paulo and Diego, or Jacob," had been sent to Curaçao "to take charge of the cattle at pasture there" (O'Callaghan, Fernow, and Brodhead 1853–1887, 2:23–47).

It is unclear whether the Portuguese reconquest of Dutch Brazil in the mid-seventeenth century resulted in an influx of slaves brought to Curaçao by Dutch settlers from Brazil. Goodman (1987, 361–405) claimed that Papiamentu must have derived from the Portuguese that slaves had learned in Brazil, from where they later fled to Curaçao with their Dutch masters. Although his theory on the origin of Papiamentu is questionable, there is evidence that some Dutch refugees did, in fact, manage to take their slaves with them when abandoning Dutch Brazil. In his description of Amsterdam in the year 1685, Abraham Idaña refers to the presence of "a lot of blacks from Brazil" who had become free after entering the Dutch Republic and were working for a salary (Teensma 1991, 131). Binder (1976, 42–43) mentions three privateers from Zeeland who rescued Dutch settlers from the island of Itamaracá after the fall of Recife in 1654 and took them to "the Antilles," where, upon arrival, the privateers "confiscated half of their slaves in compensation of their costs." Du Tertre (1667–1671, 1:460–65) confirms the arrival in Martinique and Guadeloupe of hundreds of refugees from Dutch Brazil, accompanied by their slaves, in 1654.

It is doubtful, however, that these refugees later moved with their slaves to Curaçao or that similar large numbers of slaves arrived on the island directly from Dutch Brazil. The only recorded massive influx of refugees from Brazil occurred between December 1643 and June 1644, when some 450 WIC soldiers who had fled from Maranhão landed on Curaçao. In the original documents, this group is characterized as "all Company's servants,"

which makes it unlikely that they brought large numbers of slaves (Gehring and Schiltkamp 1987, 30–55, 224). Moreover, most of the refugees from Maranhão left Curaçao quickly because of lack of food and continued their journey to New Netherland, where soldiers were badly needed following a war that had erupted with the native Lenapes. Captain Jan de Vries brought with him from Maranhão a *swartinne* (black woman), with whom he later had a mixed-race son, and at least one slave called Elary (Elária) d’Crioolle. It is not known whether De Vries’s other slave Paolo (Paulo) de Angola also accompanied him from Maranhão or whether other WIC officials in his company also took slaves with them (Evans 1901, 23; Van Laer 1974, 4:333). There is no evidence either that Sephardic Jews, who came to Curaçao after having fled Dutch Brazil, brought large numbers of slaves with them. Emmanuel and Emmanuel (1970, 1:41–47) mention only two: Abraham Drago’s Angolan slave Juan Pinto and Isaac Serano’s “mulatto servant.” Another indication that claims of an influx of slaves from Dutch Brazil to Curaçao are probably unfounded is Matthias Beck’s complaint in 1655 to his superior, Stuyvesant, that of all the slaves living in Curaçao, “no more than twenty . . . are able to do heavy labor” (Gehring and Schiltkamp 1987, 81).

This does not mean that the Portuguese reconquest of Brazil had no consequences for Curaçao. While in the past, the WIC slave trade infrastructure in Africa had almost exclusively served to supply plantation owners in Dutch Brazil, the company decided to venture into new markets to make its remaining possessions along the African coast profitable. Ironically, the same WIC that had originally been created to fight the Spanish enemy became the main slave supplier to Spanish plantation owners in the Americas. In the context of this new policy, Curaçao acquired strategic importance as a major slave distribution center for the entire Caribbean. Starting in 1656, hundreds of slaves began to arrive on the island, from where they were sold as quickly as possible to Spanish merchants (Klooster 2016, 175–82).

It is unclear which criteria the Dutch used to decide which slaves they wanted to keep and which were to be sold to the Spanish. The fact that inhabitants were not allowed to buy perfectly healthy slaves for their private use until 1674 indicates that many of those who remained were probably *manquerons*, slaves whose physical condition did not allow for hard labor on a plantation and were therefore difficult to sell (Emmanuel and Emmanuel 1970, 1:75). In 1659, for instance, Beck referred to the arrival of twenty-eight Cape Verdean slaves, who because of their condition and age were “almost worthless” (Gehring and Schiltkamp 1987, 157, 163). The total number of those who resided permanently on the island must, in any case, have remained small in the early decades of Dutch rule. Significantly, Beck informed Stuyvesant in 1659 that he was unable to send him “any of the old Company Negroes as requested,” because “twelve of them are occupied at Bonayra” and, therefore, “there are not enough here to carry out the necessary duties for the Company” (Gehring and Schiltkamp 1987, 123).

The only known reference with regard to the ethnic origin of Curaçao's charter generation comes from a letter by Beck, sent to Stuyvesant in 1660, about the arrival of two Spanish captains from Cádiz eager to fill their ships with slaves at a time when none were available for sale. In order not to disappoint his Spanish customers, Beck requested "both from the freemen as well as from the Company's servants that they loan the Company as many Negroes as possible from their plantations with the promise that they shall be compensated with good Negroes in their place from the first Company Negroes who arrive." He identified the sixty-two slaves he was eventually able to gather "with great difficulty from the Company as well as private parties" as "Cape Verdean blacks" (Gehring and Schiltkamp 1987, 162).

Religion, Language, and Culture in the Cape Verde Islands

Beck's reference in 1659 to *manquerons* from the Cape Verde Islands and, in 1660, to the sixty-two Cape Verdeans residing on the island, renders credibility to Jacobs's claim that Curaçao's charter generation must have predominantly originated from Upper Guinea. The likelihood that many of these enslaved Africans communicated in an Afro-Portuguese Creole language can be confirmed on the basis of seventeenth-century documents. Writing about the Cape Verdean island of Santo Antão in 1629, Johannes de Laet observed that the black population "spoke good Portuguese," and, when visiting the Cape Verde Islands in 1652, the Jesuit António Vieira wrote that there was "no necessity to teach our language to these people, because they all speak Portuguese here," albeit "in their own manner" (De Laet 1931–1937, 1:115; Vieira 1885, 1:97). According to Soares (2006), the fact that local clergymen, rather than priests from Portugal, had been responsible for the evangelization of blacks on the islands played a crucial role in the dissemination of Cape Verdean Creole rather than Standard Portuguese.

The Luso-African culture that had developed on these islands soon reached the nearby African shore when Cape Verdeans settled along the Upper Guinea coastline and rivers to engage in trade. These so-called *lançados* or *tangomaos* established relationships with local women, which gave origin to the development of a Luso-African community characterized by a syncretic form of Catholicism. Closely related to them were the Kristons, Africans who had converted to Catholicism. Writing about the island of Bissis (Pecixe, Guinea-Bissau) in 1630, De Laet confirmed that the black population "spoke Portuguese very well" (1931–1937, 1:197–98). By that time, Cape Verdean Creole Portuguese had become the lingua franca used for business in the entire Upper Guinea coastal region (Green 2012, 12). A confirmation that many of the enslaved Africans labeled as "Cape Verdeans" in the Americas were able to speak Portuguese can be found in Manuel Calado's report from 1648 on Dutch Brazil. According to Calado,

a Portuguese Jew had smuggled enslaved Africans from the Cape Verde Islands into the Dutch colony, where he mixed them on the slave market with people from the Bight of Benin in the hope that nobody would notice their true origin. Unfortunately for him, the Cape Verdeans started to speak in Portuguese and “told people where they came from because some of them were ladinos” (Calado 2004, 1:237–38).

It is important to note that these Luso-African communities considered their adoption of Portuguese cultural elements a matter of distinction, even superiority, vis-à-vis other Africans. Significantly, in 1738, Moore observed that “they reckon themselves still as well as if they were actually white, and nothing angers them more than to call them Negroes, that being a term they use only for slaves” (29). Mark (1999) confirms that by the early eighteenth century the Luso-African communities of the Cape Verde Islands and the West African coast from Senegal to Sierra Leone used a European identity discourse to identify themselves as subjects of the king of Portugal. To this day, Kohl (2016, 47) writes, Kristons “stress their historical roles as brokers for the Portuguese, emphasizing their part-European genealogies, urban residence and Christian beliefs and often, in doing so, drawing a boundary between them and the ‘uncivilized’ (religiously and socially) rural population.”

According to Seibert (2012, 49) and Kohl (2016, 45), religious brotherhoods played a crucial role in the identity formation of these communities. The Cape Verdean brotherhoods were modeled upon Iberian Catholic associations of laypeople known in Portugal as *irmandades* or *confrarias*. Such Iberian brotherhoods were dedicated to either a Catholic saint or to the Virgin Mary and annually celebrated the day dedicated to their patron. Starting in the fifteenth century, “black brotherhoods” had developed in urban centers on the Iberian Peninsula with large African slave populations. These black brotherhoods possessed a hierarchical structure in which European aristocratic titles were used. For instance, according to Chapter XXVI of the black brotherhood of Our Lady of the Rosary in Lisbon, members willing to be candidates for prince, count, queen, and king had to submit their requests to an electoral commission. These election ceremonies were accompanied by parades and dances, in which Iberian traditions came to be mixed with indigenous African elements. Although black brotherhoods usually had a white treasurer and had to submit their statutes for approval to the authorities, it should be stressed that these organizations were not forced upon the slave community. Documents indicate that the desire to create a brotherhood came from within the community itself. This is not surprising considering that brotherhoods strengthened solidarity among blacks, enabled the maintenance or construction of a collective identity, provided a mutual-aid system to care for the needy, and secured a minimal social mobility that, in exceptional cases, could lead to freedom. Moreover, brotherhoods functioned as a means of cultural affirmation, as they provided blacks with a

chance to have their own chapels, to participate in processions with their own performances, and to make sure that members received an honorable funeral and burial place (Saunders 1982, 105–65; Dewulf 2017, 97–132).

Starting in the fifteenth century, the Portuguese and Spanish exported brotherhoods and their rituals to their overseas possessions. The earliest reference to the existence of a black brotherhood in the Americas dates to 1540 in Lima, Peru (Bowser 1974, 247). The first references to black brotherhoods in Brazil, Cuba, and Mexico date to the late sixteenth century (Leite 1938–1941, 3:340–41; Ortiz 1921, 25–78; Von Germeten 2006, 2–3). It is little known, however, that African brotherhoods have a history that is much older than their Latin American counterparts. In fact, the first brotherhood in Africa, dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary, was already established in 1495 on the Cape Verdean island of Santiago (Green 2012, 105). By the mid-sixteenth century, brotherhoods not only thrived on all Cape Verdean Islands but also had been exported to the nearby African mainland, where they disseminated the Rosary cult, with its chaplets, canticles, veneration songs, and prayer sessions, accompanied by rhythmic instruments (Seibert 2012, 49; Kohl 2016, 45). As local folklorists have shown, the rhythm of the famous Cape Verdean *batuque* drum music with its accompanying call-and-response songs originates from recitations of the mysteries of the rosary that used to take place in brotherhoods (Semedo and Turano 1997, 59–90). Similar to other parts of the Portuguese Empire, brotherhoods in the Cape Verde Islands were traditionally led by “kings” and “queens.” Documents indicate that as late as the mid-eighteenth century, it was common to see “gatherings of the kings of the brotherhood of the Rosary” in Santiago and that “in all neighborhoods of the island women and men were elected to serve as kings and queens, who every Sunday and holiday stage parades with their flags, drums and flutes in order to collect money” (Pereira 2005, 338).

Religion, Language, and Culture in Curaçao

Missionary zeal was a key element to the creation of the Dutch West India Company, and, in the early decades of Dutch rule in the Americas, the Dutch Reformed Church had the ambition to convert as many people as possible to Protestantism. In 1630, militant Dutch Calvinists even interpreted the conquest of Pernambuco as the beginning of the end of Catholic dominance in the Americas (Joosse 2008, 78).

Initially, this missionary ethos also applied to Curaçao. In 1650, the Amsterdam classis had welcomed Johannes Walraven’s report that Reverend Charles de Rochefort had baptized “twelve adult persons, all blacks” on Curaçao after they “had been reasonably well instructed in the Christian doctrine” (Hastings and Corwin 1901–1916, 1:280–81). Only ten years later, however, the classis reacted angrily to the news that Reverend

Adrianus van Beaumont had baptized fifteen indigenous children on the island. The classis rebuked the minister and reminded him that “no one, who is an adult, is [to be] admitted to baptism without previous confession of his faith. Accordingly, the adult Negroes and Indians must also be previously instructed and make confession of their faith before Holy Baptism may be administered to them.” The condition for baptism had switched, thus, from a “reasonably well instruction” to a “confession of faith,” which implied proof of a good comprehension of the beliefs of the church, including the ability to answer all 129 questions in the Heidelberg Catechism. Moreover, the classis added that “as long as the parents are actually heathens, although they were baptized in the gross (by wholesale, by Papists), the children may not be baptized.” With this stipulation the classis indicated that even Catholic slaves—those who had been baptized “by Papists” in Africa—were now to be treated as pagans, which implied that children of Catholic slaves could no longer be baptized until their parents had made a confession of faith. Van Beaumont apologized for his actions and referred to Dutch Brazil, where “baptismal practices had been very liberal,” and promised that he would henceforth adopt “a stricter policy” (Hastings and Corwin 1901–1916, 1:508).

The decision of the classis decision with regard to Curaçao mirrored what happened in New Netherland, where the Reformed Church also put a halt to the baptism of slave children in the late 1650s. This change in policy was a likely consequence of the loss of Brazil, which had forced the classis to rethink its American destiny in accordance with the new strategy adopted by the WIC. The Reformed Church’s recognition that its ambition to transform the Americas into a Protestant continent had failed induced a transformation from an all-embracing church that had the ambition to replace Catholicism in the Americas into a church of the elected that placed increasing emphasis on orthodoxy (Dewulf 2017, 45–46).

Important in terms of language is that the initial missionary efforts by the Reformed Church had been accompanied by a desire to provide schooling to slave children. In Dutch Brazil, where blacks constituted 7 percent of all documented Calvinist baptisms, the Spanish Calvinist minister Vincent Soler announced, in 1636, plans to build an annex to the church to cater to the Christian education of baptized slave children. In 1645, the company appointed Jan Perkins, a soldier who “understands the Portuguese and speaks their language” and was “interested in using this language to teach,” as schoolmaster to the blacks. Still in 1648, the Reformed Church in Recife expressed the hope that “some hardworking people well trained in religion and with a decent lifestyle might be sent over here and once they have learned the Portuguese language, they will be employed in teaching the blacks” (Schalkwijk 1998, 151; Teensma 1999, 11–12; Noorlander 2011, 111–13, 205). We observe a similar pattern in New Netherland, where at least fifty-five children of black parentage were baptized in the Reformed

Church. In 1636, Everardus Bogardus asked the company to send a schoolmaster to New Amsterdam “to teach and train the youth of both Dutch and blacks in the knowledge of Jesus Christ” and eventually made it possible for Adam Roelantsz van Dokkum to be appointed for this task (Jacobs 2005, 313–17).

Considering the emphasis on schooling for both Dutch and black youth, we can assume that a continuation of this liberal baptismal policy would have, also in Curaçao, led to a situation whereby the use of the Dutch language among black Protestants increased and ultimately may have led to the adoption of Dutch as their first language. Unlike in New Netherland, however, Dutch Reformed missionary efforts in Curaçao never got off the ground and failed to form a similar (though small) black, Dutch-speaking Protestant community that remained part of the Dutch Reformed Church in North America for many decades after the English conquest of Manhattan in 1664 (Dewulf 2017, 54–55).

This does not mean that the slave population in Curaçao remained isolated from Christianity. Already in 1660, Michiel Zyperius informed the classis from Curaçao that “Papists . . . who sometimes arrived there” were baptizing slave children on the island (Hastings and Corwin 1901–1916, 1:493). In fact, the change in policy of the Reformed Church was accompanied by the pragmatic tolerance of occasional visits to Curaçao by Catholic priests from the Spanish mainland. Not only white Protestant slaveholders allowed these priests to baptize their newborn slave children. As Maduro (1934, 69–78) has shown, also the slaves of the Jewish community in Curaçao were not circumcised but rather baptized by Catholic priests.

The apparent lack of concern among the authorities regarding the presence of Catholic priests becomes clearer if we take into consideration the geographical proximity of the Spanish-controlled mainland, where a royal decree placed in liberty “all black slaves that flee the English and Dutch colonies with the pretext to embrace our Holy Catholic Faith” (Childs 2006, 43). The desertion of enslaved Africans to Spanish territory for religious reasons was not a chimera. In Puerto Rico, for instance, Governor Estivan Bravao de Rivero argued in 1716 that numerous slaves had fled to the island “in search of the Catholic religion” (Gaspar 1985, 23–24). That this concern was also very real in Curaçao can be confirmed by the fact that as late as 1773, the apostolic prefect reported that slaves from Curaçao had been fleeing to Venezuela on the pretense that, in Spanish territory, they could freely practice their Catholic faith (Lampe 2001, 142). It seems, thus, that the Dutch toleration of Catholic priests in Curaçao was not a matter of neglect but rather a conscious decision in the awareness that preventing slaves from having their children baptized would only increase attempts to flee.

The presence of Catholic priests in what was, after all, a Dutch Protestant colony was a delicate matter that initially had to occur in secrecy and allowed for only short visits. The first officially sanctioned visit by Catholic

clergy to Curaçao took place in 1677, more than twenty years after the Reformed Church had closed its doors to the black population. For this reason, we have no data on the missionary strategy used by the earliest priests, nor do we know how the slave population organized itself. Considering that priests did not have the means to reach the entire island and were limited in time, the development of a black Catholic community must have required at least some form of organization within the slave community. This raises the question of whether brotherhoods may have fulfilled this role.

We do know with certainty that black brotherhoods existed in Curaçao. Research by Rupert (2012, 179) in the Archivo de Falcón, Coro, revealed that by the mid-eighteenth century “several religious brotherhoods [*cofradías*] in Coro had direct ties to similar societies in Curaçao” and that “one such society in Coro, the Cofradía del Carmen, even sent a delegation to collect alms from their brothers on the island.” When and by whom these brotherhoods had been created remains an open question. The observation by the Jesuit Michael Alexius Schabel in the early eighteenth century that Catholic slaves on the island had their “own religious system” seems to indicate that the slave community had already, at an early stage, built its own Catholic organizations (Lampe 2001, 131).

This assumption can be strengthened with reference to black cultural traditions on the island that correspond to brotherhood practices in Latin America and the Cape Verde Islands. An example is the apparently incongruous comment by the free black community of Curaçao that they, rather than the free mulattoes, should march first in the 1740 parade because “they had kings” (Jordaan 2013, 167–68). Such discussions were fairly common in Latin America, where mulattoes were traditionally excluded from brotherhoods organized according to African slave nations and forced to form their own societies that were not allowed to have “African kings” as leaders (Barcia 2009, 89–90; Rossi 1926/1958, 68). In Cuba, brotherhood kings would typically parade on Epiphany in manners highly similar to the crowned Epiphany kings recorded by Brenneker (1986, 41) in Bonaire (Ortiz 1992, 6; Howard 1998, 44). The *West-Indisch Plakaatboek* includes many more references to similar festive parades of blacks playing instruments, singing songs, and carrying flags in the streets of Curaçao that parallel Latin American brotherhood practices (Schiltkamp and Smidt 1978, 1:271; 2:518, 831).

Moreover, several of the most enigmatic popular traditions of Curaçao’s black Catholic community, such as the *ocho día* (eight days of mourning the deceased), the novena, the use of rosaries as charms, and the popularity of the Portuguese St. Anthony (or Lele Tony, as the saint is locally known), all correspond to customs that, in Latin America, typically flourished in the context of Afro-Iberian brotherhoods (Brenneker 1975, 2508; Allen 2007, 150; Lampe 2001, 139). Other examples can also be named. The tradition among Curaçaoan slaves to remove the infant Christ from St. Anthony statues or to place the statue upside down in water to put pressure on the saint

to fulfill one's wish corresponds to a Portuguese popular custom and was common among slaves in Brazil (Allen 2007, 241; Braga 1885, 2:297; Stein 1985, 203). Similar practices have been observed in Bas-Congo, a region of Africa with a strong historical Portuguese influence, with statues of St. Anthony known as Ntoni or Toni Malau, Kikongo for "St. Anthony who provides good luck" (Randles 1968, 150–51). We also find parallels between Portuguese popular traditions and the former Curaçaoan practice to beat and burn effigies of Judas around Easter (Brenneker 1986, 50, 247; Karasch 1987, 275–77). Typically Lusitanian bonfire rituals in honor of St. John still exist today in Curaçao. These customs were common in all parts of Africa with a strong Portuguese influence. For instance, when visiting the Kongoles province of Soyo in the late seventeenth century, the Capuchin Andrea da Pavia observed a "great celebration with fires and other demonstrations" on St. John's Eve. While Da Pavia did not explain what type of "demonstrations" he saw, he added that he had spoken about these festivities "with priests in Brazil, who confirmed that blacks over there celebrated St. John in the same way" (Jadin 1970, 448).

Brenneker also points at the existence of Afro-Catholic burial societies, known in Curaçao as *seters* or *sociedades di caba*. "Every neighborhood has one," he explains, "and people are often members of more than one." In exchange for a modest monthly fee, these societies guarantee a decent burial. Like brotherhoods, they have their own banners and names, such as Los Hermanos, or that of a Catholic patron saint, such as San Pedro, La Birgen Nos Mama, San Hosé, and Santa Lucia. These societies assist families in organizing *ocho dia* rituals by providing, for instance, extra chairs as well as liquor for the male visitors, who, after paying respect to the deceased, "wash their hands" by drinking a shot of brandy (Brenneker 1961, 17; 1972, 1107; 1975, 2487–89). The importance of these societies helps us to understand Jordaan's (2013, 150) surprise that there was so much resistance within the Papiamentu-speaking black population in Curaçao to providing a decent burial to deceased *bozals*, or *bourriques* (asses), as they were known among Papiamentu speakers. Not only were such unbaptized newcomers from Africa considered inferior; they had never contributed a single dime to one of the island's burial societies. This attitude was not unique to slaves in Curaçao. For instance, in eighteenth-century Haiti, then still called Saint-Domingue, Moreau de Saint-Méry (1875–76, 1:39–41) observed that slaves "who have knowledge of Catholicism . . . which they obtained through the Portuguese," tended to look down on newly arrived *bozals* who had not yet been baptized.

The rituals of these Curaçaoan burial societies can easily be traced back to brotherhoods. In his eighteenth-century description of slave brotherhoods in Peru, for instance, Rossi y Rubí (1791, 115–17, 121–24) explains in detail how members used to gather at the house of a deceased "to wake the dead body" and how "everyone contributed to cover the costs of the burial"

as well as “the purchase of brandy.” It is also important to stress that burial societies with highly similar rituals to those described by Brenneker still exist today on the Cape Verdean island of Santiago, where they are known as *tabancas*. Like the ancient brotherhoods, *tabancas* function as mutual-aid associations in the island’s poorest neighborhoods. In exchange for a modest monthly fee, they ensure that members receive a decent funeral. They are led by a “king” or a “governor,” who has his own delegates and who represents the community in negotiations with the authorities. On the feast day of the *tabanca*’s patron saint, dues are collected, a procession with music and people carrying the society’s banner is organized, members gather for a communal dinner, drums are played, and dances take place (Cardoso 1933, 39–43; Pereira 2005, 352; Semedo and Turano 1997, 59–90).

There are, thus, strong indications that brotherhoods did, effectively, have a strong influence on the development of popular cultural traditions among Curaçao’s black population. The surprising parallels to the Cape Verde Islands also suggest that some of these traditions may have been introduced by members of Curaçao’s charter generation. While it is impossible to sustain this assumption with seventeenth-century documentary evidence, the observation by Brenneker (1961, 63) that the catechization of slaves in rural parts of Curaçao that were difficult to reach by Catholic priests had historically occurred through black laypersons known as sacristans, which he translated as “a type of catechists,” does point in this direction. Lampe (2001, 130–31) also refers to black laypeople teaching the catechism and the rosary and administering the sacrament of baptism to slaves, concluding that “the oppressed” (i.e., the slaves) must have been “evangelized by the oppressed.”

This is not unique to Curaçao. We find a similar phenomenon in other parts of the Americas with a large concentration of slaves originating from parts of Africa with a strong Portuguese influence. For instance, a report from the 1760s by Christian Oldendorp about the Danish Virgin Islands shows that it was common, “primarily by the Negroes from the Congo,” to perform “a kind of baptism . . . characterized by pouring water over the head of the baptized, placing some salt in his mouth, and praying over him in the Congo language.” “Before the baptism,” he argues, “an adult *Bussal* must receive five to six lashes from the baptizer, for the sins which he had committed in Guinea. Afterwards there is a Negro celebration, provided by the more prosperous of the slaves.” According to Oldendorp, these slaves had “recognition of the true God and of Jesus Christ” and had learned these baptismal rituals “from Portuguese priests in Africa.” Oldendorp also explains that the practice involved baptismal fathers and mothers who “adopt those whom they have baptized . . . and look after them as best they can. They are obliged to provide them with a coffin and burial clothing when they die” (1987, 263). The fact that these catechists catered to the needs of these newly arrived slaves and ensured a Christian burial suggests that they operated in the context of a brotherhood-related organization.

In South Carolina, where seventeenth-century records list dozens of slaves with Iberian Catholic baptismal names, we find a similar phenomenon (Brown 2012, 49–51). When Francis Le Jau approached the local slave community in 1710 he was surprised to find that some “were born and baptized among the Portuguese,” which prompted the English missionary to mandate that they would be admitted to communion only upon renouncing the “errors of the Romish Church . . . the chief of which is praying to the saints” (1999, 27–30). The anonymous author of the “Account of the Negroe Insurrection in South Carolina” from October 1739 also observed that “amongst the Negroe Slaves there are a people brought from the Kingdom of Angola in Africa, many of these speak Portuguese . . . and . . . profess the Roman Catholic religion” (Smith 2005, 13–15). One century later, when Thomas Turpin (1834) arrived in some of South Carolina’s most isolated villages to do missionary work, he observed that the black population had “societies organized among themselves” that “appeared to be very much under the influence of Roman Catholic principles.”

These examples indicate that even without institutional structures provided by the Catholic Church, some slave communities with roots in parts of Africa with a strong Portuguese influence may have been able to preserve certain Afro-Iberian Catholic rituals and seem to have done so in the context of organizations modeled on brotherhoods. While we do not have documentary evidence to support the assumption that something similar occurred with Curaçao’s charter generation, the (possible) existence of brotherhoods would provide a convincing explanation for the development on the island of a strong Afro-Catholic identity in adverse circumstances and without the coordination by official Catholic authorities. This possibility would, furthermore, explain the singular character of black Catholicism in Curaçao and the constant tensions in later centuries between the official Catholic authorities that meanwhile had been allowed to establish themselves on the island and the black community, eager to preserve its own (Afro-Iberian) traditions. In 1759, tensions were such that the black community even threatened to separate from the official Catholic Church and to build its own (Schiltkamp and De Smidt 1978, 1:246; Rupert 2012, 152).

Religion, Popular Culture, and the Development of Papiamentu

One could argue that the singular nature and strong “we-consciousness” of Curaçao’s black Catholic community found a linguistic parallel in the population’s attachment to Papiamentu rather than Dutch or Spanish. This assumption is not without reason, as historical data do indicate that mutual-aid and burial practices could influence the transmission of the charter generation’s key identity markers, including its language, to later generations. A revealing example can be found in the former Dutch colony of Suriname,

established in 1667, where a missionary worker of the Moravian Church noted in 1745 that the slaves in the capital Paramaribo “do not all belong to one nation but to several,” which forced them to use “Negro-English in order to communicate among themselves.” Yet whenever there was a funeral, “each nation conducts it in its own native language” (Staehelin 1919, 91).

Because brotherhoods played a crucial role in the organization of mutual aid and guaranteed a decent funeral to their members, there can be no doubt that they fostered community feelings. The prayers for the deceased, care for the sick, and assistance to the needy inevitably brought people together. This was all the more the case under the stultifying circumstances of slavery on an island where blacks remained excluded from any form of social solidarity by the Dutch Reformed Church. With regard to language use within the slave community, it is important to recall that Papiamentu derived from the Afro-Portuguese Creole of the Cape Verdean charter generation and that already by the late-1670s, slaves to Curaçao came almost exclusively from Kwa- and Bantu-speaking areas in Africa. References to no less than forty-one different African slave nations in Father Gambier’s 1755 baptismal book reveal that the ethnic origin of the island’s slave community had diversified tremendously by the mid-eighteenth century (Hoetink 1959, 71; Nooijen 1995, 28–29). The survival of a language based on Cape Verdean Portuguese indicates that there must have been some type of mechanism that stimulated the transmission of crucial elements of the charter generation’s cultural identity at a time when the ethnic composition of the island’s slave community began to change dramatically. With regard to language, one could think here of the repetitive nature of Afro-Catholic brotherhood rituals. In prayer sessions, for instance, the words of the *rezador* are repeated over and over again by the others (Lampe 2001, 139). One could, for instance, imagine how the hour-long recitation of the mysteries of the Rosary may have functioned as authentic teaching sessions for newly arrived slaves on the island.

The fact that all brotherhoods within the Portuguese Empire used the same prayers—the rosary in particular—may have contributed to some remarkable parallels that linguists have observed between Portuguese-derived Creoles in different parts of Africa, and even on other continents. One could refer to Papia Kristang, a Portuguese Creole spoken in Southeast Asia, that displays parallels to Papiamentu (Holm 1987, 413). The history of Papia Kristang reveals an intimate connection between Catholicism, brotherhoods, and language. Research by Baxter (1988, 8) confirms that Catholic brotherhoods played a key role in building community feelings and preserving certain identity markers, including language, long after Portuguese colonial rule in the region had come to an end. According to Baxter, “that religion itself was quite important is clearly suggested by the word *kristáng*” and “the role of the fraternity of the *irmáng di greza* (brothers of the Church) in providing an element of cultural continuity was significant.”

Obviously, the fact that brotherhoods played a key role in the transmission of Papia Kristang to later generations does not imply that the same must have happened with Papiamentu. It is, however, remarkable that the very same Cape Verdean Afro-Portuguese Creole language that laid the basis for Papiamentu is also called Kriston in Casamance (Kihm 1994, 2). An interesting parallel to today's Curaçao is its use of the expression *cristão da terra* (lit. Christian of the land), or its synonym *filho da terra* (lit. child of the land), to highlight the strong “we-consciousness” in Casamance Kriston-speaking communities, which corresponds to the famous Curaçaoan demonym *yu di Kòrsou* (lit. child of Curaçao), with *yu* being derived from the Portuguese *filho*. The same we-consciousness is embedded in the intimate, cozy undertone of the originally Portuguese term *papear*, the meaning of which corresponds to the English “to chat,” which gave its name to both Papiamentu and Papia Kristang.

The connection between this we-consciousness and the Afro-Catholic identity of the island's charter generation may also explain the above-mentioned disdain vis-à-vis *bozals*, unbaptized newcomers. It is well known that Papiamentu, over time, acquired the reputation of being a “dignified” black language, as compared to the “primitive” Guene that was spoken by black plantation workers in rural parts of Curaçao (Rupert 2012, 233). The many stories of Guene being a secret language, used for sorcery, could imply that the language was primarily used by those who had come to the island from parts of Africa that had not been Christianized and where people were unaccustomed with the Afro-Iberian traditions of the Papiamentu-speaking blacks in Curaçao (Brenneker 1986, 256).

Because the term *Guene* probably derives from the word *Guinea*, one could be inclined to trace its speakers to the Gulf of Guinea and assume that the language survived in parts of Curaçao, where most field workers had arrived on the island as Akan-, Fon-, Yoruba-, Edo- or Igbo-speaking *bozals*. Interestingly, however, the expression “Tukaka a pari Gueni, trupa di Luangu, Tukaka a parti Gueni, esta Luanganan!” (Tucacas has given birth to people from Guinea, a troupe of Loangos, Tucacas has given birth to people from Guinea, meaning Loangos) does not link the Guene language to the Gulf of Guinea but rather to the Kingdom of Loango in Central Africa (Allen 2007, 169). This corresponds to Brenneker's (1961, 61) observation that Guene was also known in Curaçao as *lenga di luango* (language of Loango) or *macamba*, the latter term possibly referring to people from the rural Niari Valley in the Loango Kingdom, locally known as the Bakamba. If Guene was, indeed, a language with roots in Loango, it must have been derived from the Bantu language Vili rather than Akan or other Guinean languages.

One could speculate that the prestige of Afro-Iberian identity markers among Papiamentu speakers may have contributed to the fact that people from Loango acquired a boorish reputation in Curaçao. While the

Portuguese Catholic influence in Central Africa had been strong in the heartland of the Kingdom of Kongo, located in the north of today's Angola, this was much less the case in the kingdom's northern periphery, where Loango was situated. Hence, slaves from Loango may well have been looked down on as "primitive" by Papiamentu speakers in Curaçao, since they arrived without any knowledge of Portuguese and had probably not even been baptized. In Cuba, for instance, slaves from Loango and other peripheral areas of the Kongo kingdom were excluded from the island's prestigious brotherhood of the Congo Reales and had to form their own brotherhoods, such as that of the Congo Macamba (Thornton 2016, 8–12; Childs 2006, 240). A similar attitude of disdain may have reigned among Curaçao's profoundly Iberianized charter generation and its Papiamentu-speaking descendants, which would explain expressions in Papiamentu such as "to speak Loango" (meaning "to say stupid things"), "to dress like a Loango" (meaning "ridiculously"), "to insult a Loango is like giving a banana to a monkey," or "what your Loango grandmother taught you today, my Creole one already taught me yesterday" (Hoetink 1959, 70; Van Meeteren 1947, 233–34). Yet even for Loangos there was hope, then, as the Papiamentu saying goes, "si bo fòrsa buza, buza ta papia latin," meaning "if you force the *bozal*, the *bozal* will [even] speak Latin" (Allen 2007, 73). The use of the term *Latin* in this derogatory expression clearly has a Catholic connotation.

Our focus on religion may also help to find an answer to one of the most controversial questions with regard to the genesis of Papiamentu: the origin of the strong Spanish element. In fact, because the vast majority of Papiamentu's modern lexicon is derived from Spanish, some linguists even claim that the language should be considered a Spanish-based rather than Portuguese-based Creole (Maduro 1991; Munteanu 1996). While Jacobs (2012, 27–30) convincingly rejects this hypothesis with the argument that "the concentration of Portuguese elements in the basic vocabulary of Papiamentu suggests that these elements belong to the oldest layers of its grammar, something that the Spanish origin hypotheses cannot readily account for," he struggles to find an explanation for the strong Spanish element. He points at Spanish-speaking members within the slave-owning Dutch community, regular contacts with Spanish speakers from the mainland, and highlights the role of Spanish-speaking Sephardim, but admits that in the first decades of Dutch rule the number of Jews in Curaçao was small and that, even later, Jews owned only a small minority of the slaves. He, therefore, concludes that Catholicism must have played a key role. Because "Spanish was heavily associated with the slaves' religious instruction," he argues, it "may have granted it the necessary prestige and accessibility necessary to initiate far-reaching relexification of the basic vocabulary" (333–35). While I do not wish to completely reject a theory that sustains my own argument that the development of Papiamentu on the island paralleled that of Catholicism, I am skeptical about the assumption that the impact of

Spanish priests on the charter generation's children and grandchildren was such that it led to massive relexification.

Historical data on the origin and cultural identity of Curaçao's earliest slave population suggest that linguists may have made a mistake by limiting their search for Spanish-speakers on the island to outsiders. Significantly, mid-seventeenth-century records from the Reformed Church in Curaçao refer to a black man called Johannes who taught indigenous children "Spanish prayers" (Knappert 1934, 39). Also the case of the four slaves belonging to the Spanish captain Gallardo in 1652 shows that Jacobs and other linguists ignored that Spanish speakers may well have come from within the island's black community itself. In fact, the slaves Lucía, Joseph, Paulo, and Diego had all been captured on a Spanish ship traveling from Jamaica to Cuba. Because they had lived in what was then still a Spanish colony, one can reasonably assume that they had some familiarity with the Spanish language before arriving in Curaçao. If these four slaves did effectively speak an Iberian language, the name Diego indicates that it was more likely to be Spanish than Portuguese. Also the surname of Jan Creoly, who was arrested in 1645 for child abuse in New Netherland but had previously lived in Curaçao, cautions us to spontaneously assume that all members of Curaçao's charter generation had necessarily been born in Africa. We should not forget that the Dutch conquered the island at a relatively late stage in the colonial history of the Americas and that it is likely that at least some of the blacks onboard Iberian vessels captured by Dutch privateers had already been living in Spanish-speaking areas. The case of New Netherland, where much more data on the slave population is available than in Curaçao, shows that it would be a mistake to assume that charter generations in seventeenth-century Dutch Atlantic colonies were homogeneous groups. While the vast majority of slaves in New Netherland were of Central African (Angolan-Kongolese) origin, individual ones had surnames such as Crioole, Crioelje, Crioell, and Criolyo, or indicated the Cape Verde Islands São Tomé, Santo Domingo, Cartagena, Paraíba (Brazil), and even Spain and Portugal as their place of origin (Dewulf 2017, 39–40). Although this does not imply that the same must have occurred in Curaçao, linguists should at least consider the possibility that a considerable minority of members composing the island's charter generation may have lived in Spanish-speaking territory before arriving in Curaçao.

The reference to the "Spanish prayers" that Johannes was teaching children allows for a connection to an additional group that has traditionally remained ignored by linguists: the Native population. It is, in fact, surprising that successive linguistic studies on Papiamentu depart from wrong assumptions with regard to Curaçao's Native population. Unlike what has been claimed by McWhorter (1999, 117) and Kramer (2004, 108), it is not true that there were no Spanish speakers left in Curaçao by the time the first African slaves arrived on the island. As Goodman (1987, 367–70) confirms,

the island's Native population must after one century of Spanish colonization have become profoundly Hispanicized and, thus, probably "continued to use Spanish" in the early decades of Dutch rule. Hartog (1968, 41–42) is equally convinced that the seventy-five Natives, who remained in Curaçao after the Dutch conquest, must have spoken "Spanish fluently." Names of members of the Native community living in Curaçao at the time of the Dutch conquest, such as Alonso Diaz, Don Pedro Ortiz, Hernando Tuerto, Juan Galera, Jerónimo de Ávila, Juan Correa, Francisco Sanchez, Juan Mateo, Juan Prieto and Juan Mestiso, point at a high degree of Hispanicization. Moreover, accounts in the Archivo General de Indias characterize several of these men as "ladinos," which, like the surname Mestiso, indicates a mixed Spanish-indigenous identity. One account, dating to 1635, even explicitly mentions that a Curaçao "Indian" spoke "our Castilian language" (Gehring and Schiltkamp 1987, 108; De Laet 1931–1937, 4:104, 186; Wright 1934–1935, 1:201, 344–80). The attachment to Spain among the island's population characterized by the Dutch as "Indians" is also remarkable in the case of Juan Hyacinthe and Augustino Hosea. In 1722, these two "Indians" pleaded their freedom before the governor and council of St. Christopher (today's St. Kitts) for having been "forced away from the Dutch colony of Carracoe [Curaçao]," where they had lived "as free men" before being sold into slavery at St. Christopher. In doing so, they didn't even mention the Dutch but proudly claimed to be "free born subjects of the Kingdom of Spain" (Thornton 1992, 235–62).

Documents from the Dutch Reformed church provide further evidence that the Native population in Curaçao must have spoken Spanish. Significantly, Van Beaumont used a Spanish translation of the *verbondsleer* (covenant theology) to reach the indigenous population in the early 1660s and requested the authorities to provide him with a teacher who was fluent in Spanish (Knappert 1934, 39). Also Van Beaumont's successor Willem Volckeringh studied Spanish to be able to reach the non-Dutch-speaking population on the island in 1664 (Joosse 2008, 344–46). Another indication that the Native population spoke Spanish can be found in the fact that the Dutch eventually replaced the Natives' "captain" Balthasar de Montero with their Sephardic translator Samuel Coheno as supervisor of the Natives (De Laet 1931–1937, 4:184).

Strangely enough, however, Goodman rejects the assumption that the Natives may have influenced the development of Papiamentu because they allegedly "were sent to the village of Ascencion, some distance away," where they lived in "isolation" (1987, 367–70). While Jacobs (2012, 28) and other linguists followed this reasoning, documents prove that this assumption is wrong. According to De Laet (1931–1937, 4:105–6), only a small number of Natives still lived in Ascención after the Dutch conquest, whereas the vast majority of them had been moved to St. Anna, a confirmation of which can be found in documents from the Archivo General de Indias (Wright

1934–1935, 1:378, 394). It is important to stress that the Ruyters Quartier, where most enslaved Africans lived at that time, was also located in St. Anna (Gehring and Schiltkamp 1987, 100). Moreover, Beck's complaint in 1654 that he lacked a person "who was fit to command the Negroes and Indians to keep them well in hand" indicates that Natives and blacks shared the same supervisor. Also a complaint in 1643 by "the Indians and Negroes that some of the Company's servants have robbed their . . . gardens of fruit . . . near the Quarter, Piscadero and Enchorro" confirms the proximity of both communities in the early decades of Dutch rule, when Papiamentu was formed (Gehring and Schiltkamp 1987, 11, 60). Considering that most of the blacks who worked in these gardens must have spoken an Afro-Portuguese Creole and most of the Natives spoke Spanish, we find here both languages that formed Papiamentu spoken side by side in the early days of Dutch rule.

Moreover, both the Cape Verdean slaves and the seventy-five Natives, who had been allowed to stay after the Dutch conquest in 1634, shared the same Catholic religion (Rupert 2012, 24–25). We should, in fact, not forget that Curaçao had a Catholic history before the arrival of the Dutch. In the aftermath of the conquest, the Dutch encountered a Catholic church and chapels on the island (De Laet 1931–1937, 4:105). The fact that Van Walbeek had originally wanted to deport all the Natives from the island because they were "entirely Popish" indicates that they must have participated in the Catholic rituals that took place in and around these houses of worship. In fact, during the negotiations with the Spanish over the transition of power in Curaçao, Van Walbeek confirmed that the person on the island the Natives trusted most was the local Catholic priest Salvador de Carmona (1937, 303–4). Documents of the Archivo General de Indias also confirm that Natives from Curaçao identified themselves as Catholics (Wright 1934–1935, 1:201), as does De Laet's observation that most of the Natives living in Bonaire "had been brought there from St. Domingo" and "were Christians" (Hamelberg 1901, 39). Remarkably, even the Natives who led their children baptize in the Reformed Church opted for typically Iberian (Catholic) names such as Maria, Margaritha, Cecilia, and Victoria rather than Dutch names (Knappert 1934, 37–38).

The fact that no fewer than 100 of the 320 people baptized by the Spanish priests Gómez Manzo and Nicolás Caldera de Quiñones in the first officially sanctioned visit of 1677 were Natives, while virtually all others were blacks, shows not only that this community had grown substantially in the early decades of Dutch rule but also that not just their social status as bonded people and their fruit gardens, but also their Catholic faith, brought blacks and Natives together (Rupert 2012, 86–87). This conclusion again points at the importance of Catholicism as a unifying force of the island's bonded people at a time when Papiamentu was formed. While it would go too far to deduce from this that Papiamentu must have developed among the children of the Natives and African slaves, who grew up playing together in the

fruit gardens and praying in clandestinely formed Catholic societies, Jacobs's assumption that the mixture of Afro-Portuguese Creole with Spanish must have occurred quickly and at an early stage of the Dutch colony by "a small but influential bilingual speaker community" does make them a candidate for the Spanish relexification of Papiamentu that linguistic studies should not dismiss (2012, 333). This is all the more the case since research by Van Buurt and Joubert (1997) revealed that many of the Papiamentu words used in reference to the island's flora and fauna are of Amerindian origin.

Conclusion

This article has presented an interdisciplinary approach to black cultural identity formation in Curaçao with a focus on religion, language, and culture. In response to the lack of primary sources on the island's earliest slave population, it used a comparative methodology that established connections to the Cape Verde Islands, Latin America, and two other seventeenth-century Dutch Atlantic colonies. This interdisciplinary and comparative analysis revealed that Afro-Iberian elements influenced black cultural identity formation on the island and that Papiamentu at its origin was much more than just a language. It was also a cultural identity marker for a relatively small community that ended up leaving profound traces on the islands of Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao.

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