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# *Sweet Breakaway*

An ethnographic study of Aruban Calypso Music and the  
Narratives of The One Happy Island

Gregory T.E. Richardson

VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT

*Sweet Breakaway*

**An ethnographic study of Aruban Calypso Music and the Narratives of  
The One Happy Island**

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aan de Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam,  
op gezag van de rector magnificus  
prof.dr. V. Subramaniam,  
in het openbaar te verdedigen  
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door

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geboren te Aruba

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In the eight years I was involved with this project, I held different positions at different jobs. I was involved in different community projects and I got the opportunity to present and publish some of my work to a broader audience. All experiences that I cherish and through which I grew academically and – perhaps more importantly – as a person. My first son who was one year old at the time is now nine years old. Along the way my wife and I received our second son, who is now four years old. Before my children were able to speak, they knew that their father was working on a big project. To the point that they even made sarcastic jokes in the presence of company, little as they were, stating with a big grin, 'papa is never going to finish his PhD project'. Well I am elated to share with them that this part of the project is now finished. I hope they will believe me this time.

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This dissertation is dedicated to all Aruban calypsonians – past and present.

*Masha danki. Hopi bendicion*

Thanks very much. Much blessings.



Illustration 1 Aruba in the South Caribbean Sea

## **Introduction**

### **Section A**

#### **Background**

This dissertation represents the outcome of a longitudinal anthropological study which I started in 2005. The aim was to describe some of the intricate ways in which people living on the Dutch Caribbean island of Aruba engage with Calypso music – the very popular Caribbean musical genre. I found this study to be eminent as it will shed light on some of the lived realities of Dutch Caribbean people, whose lives, expressions and music I believe have not sufficiently been explored from an anthropological and ethnomusicological studies perspective. Here follows my ethnography.

#### *Jouvert*

*Jouvert-morning* or *jouvay*, as the locals call it, is one of the pinnacles of the carnival season, especially for the people of San Nicolas, being the second largest city of Aruba and considered to be the Mecca of Aruban carnival culture (Razak 1998, 28). San Nicolas is also home to one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse communities in Aruba (Richardson & Richardson 2012b). The *jouvert-morning* parade in Aruba is the parade in which the whole community can partake in however manner they feel. They do not have to pay for costumes as it is free. *Jouvert* participants can come as they are It takes place in the wee hours of the morning and it continues until the sun comes up. To get a glimpse of what the *jouvert-morning* experience might be like I

will share a short vignette on my recollection of *jouvert-morning* during my teenage years – my first experience going to such a big happening unchaperoned.

It was 4 am in the *Lago Weg*. The big band was approaching. Roadmarch-Calypso (music) was blazing. There was a chilly breeze. As the band came nearer, there was excitement everywhere. People were jumping and waving. Men had nightgowns on, and others were dancing with a toilet bowl cover. There was a man with dreadlocks beating on an old brake-drum from a car with a piece of iron. It was a total frenzy. It sounded like ‘*tiki liki liki liki liki tang ka tang, tiki liki liki liki liki tang ka tang*’. I calculated about 2 to 3 hundred persons in the mob in front of me. Some were in a drunken state from alcohol while others were intoxicated by the music. As I stepped into the jam session, an enormous heat covered my body. I saw sweat drenched bodies on one side, while others were drinking rum and whiskey out of one of those thermoses that scouts use when on their hiking trips. Some men were grinding on the *boomsies* [buttocks] of some women and some were dancing by themselves twisting their bodies into all types of states. Juancito, the flamboyant gay guy from ‘Chocolate City’, was front and center of the mob performing his ballet like theatrics.

I’d be less than honest if I told you at the time, that what I experienced during that *jouvert-morning* parade, as described in the vignette above, was anything beyond impressive. Indeed, it was very exciting, but I wouldn’t have described it as spectacular or unique.<sup>1</sup> Even though I see my *jouvay* experience differently now, back then it was very ordinary growing up on Aruba. In *jouvert-morning* it was not strange to see people of all races, ethnicities, religions, creeds and social strata in *jouvert-morning* parades dancing to the infectious rhythm of the music, in the middle of the streets of San Nicolas. It was just the way it was.

It wasn’t until 2000, when I left Aruba to study history and cultural anthropology in the Netherlands, that I discovered that my classmates were in ‘awe’ of phenomena such as *jouvert-morning*. I was baffled upon realizing it was possible to apply for research grants (receiving large

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<sup>1</sup> For a critique of ‘western’ cultural anthropology see James Clifford and George E Marcus’ ‘Writing Culture’ (1986). Also see ‘Reversed Gaze: An African Ethnography of American Anthropology’ by Mwenda Ntarangwi (2010) for a ‘non western’ view of cultural anthropology. For a discussion on ‘western’ anthropology versus ‘native’ anthropology see Kirin Narayan (1993).

sums of money) to go and study these ‘amazing’ activities in ‘exotic’ places like Ghana, New Zealand, Venezuela and Brazil. Of course, I say this with a bit sarcasm but in all honesty, I just didn't see the big deal. I would categorize my way of looking at the academic discipline of cultural anthropology as a beginning student as what some Latin American decolonial scholars, such as Aníbal Quijano, Walter Mignolo and Marisol de la Cadena describe as *producción de saberes hegemónicos* [hegemonic knowledge productions] (Pageau 2010).<sup>2</sup> I understood it to be a system of knowledge production based on a Eurocentric academic point of departure in great part linked to power and a sense of superiority.

As time went on, I too became completely immersed in the discipline as I gained more anthropological skills through courses offered by the social sciences department at the University of Utrecht. I became skilled in participant observations, ethnographic research, thick descriptions and critical analysis. Before long, I started visiting foreign lands myself and experiencing ‘culture shocks’ in my quest to deconstruct the ‘hidden’ power in the cultural structures of societies.

Looking back, this education has turned out to have its benefits as well as its limitations. Limitations because, after further travel, research and work experience, I have come to realize that constructivist approaches to cultural anthropology which I have taken up in school is premised primarily on the deconstructive rather than the descriptive. This meant that one had to operate from a place of doubt, where one had to problematize and operationalize that which was being studied in order to ‘deconstruct’ ones ‘constructed’ realities’ to be considered scholarly. A good example describing this mode of thought would be of a Mattijs van de Port’s quote in his publication entitled *Registers of Incontestability* (2004). Here he interestingly critiques this

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<sup>2</sup> Related to Antonio Gramsci’s interpretation of cultural hegemony



constructivist approach amongst the anthropologist class by saying, ‘In a million different ways the anthropologist has been taught to say: they may think it is all very real what they are doing and saying, but this is what it really is: a construct!’ (Van de Port 2004, 8).<sup>3</sup>

However, the blessing of constructivist anthropological perspectives (not to completely disregard this system) is that they have taught me to look at my surroundings critically and has taught me to appreciate all that has been a part of my entire life. In a sense it has heightened my sense of awareness and thus has made me sharper in my observations. It has brought me to the point where I began to no longer take my childhood experiences for granted, and has helped me acknowledge that experiences such as *jouvert-morning* were indeed remarkable and even worthy of deeper inquiry.

In retrospect, I look at my childhood and my first *jouvert-morning* experiences differently. As a matter of fact, I have come to find it really special. I have come to appreciate the way Arubans of different social and economic backgrounds celebrate life. As I reflect upon those events, now I wonder what triggered these people to act the way they did? What made some of them go into a complete frenzy? What brought them to seemingly overwhelming levels of ecstasy? What made ‘well respected’ persons in society act in such a charismatic fashion without a care? I may not know all the answers to these questions, but one thing is for sure, it had something to do with the music they were listening and dancing to.

What the revelers were dancing to is a musical style Arubans call *Musica di Roadmarch* or in English, Roadmarch-Calypso.<sup>4</sup> Roadmarch-Calypso, more commonly known as Soca

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<sup>3</sup> A critique earlier articulated by anthropologist Charles Lindholm (2002:334)

<sup>4</sup> As a note, therefore, for readers outside of the Dutch Caribbean, Roadmarch-Calypso, may be read as *SOCA* for the most part throughout this study. In some cases, it is used interchangeably. The two styles of music are pretty similar and often used interchangeably on the island. Furthermore Roadmarch-Calypso music in Aruba is also seen as clearly different from the ‘Roadmarch Competition’ in Trinidad and in much of the Anglophone-Caribbean basin

throughout the rest of the Anglophone Caribbean, is often described in Aruba as a faster and ‘happier’ version of the Calypso music genre, whose lyrics are mostly associated with partying and dancing (Razak 1998, 34-35; Richardson & Richardson 2012b, 67-69).<sup>5</sup> Roadmarch-Calypso is often juxtaposed to *Musica di Calipso* or Critical-Calypso, which is described as a slower version of the Calypso music genre with a particular focus on social and political commentary. In the Anglophone Caribbean, Critical-Calypso is simply known as Calypso or in some cases, Kaiso (Hill, E. 1967; Warner 1985).<sup>6</sup> A broad comparison of Critical-Calypso and Roadmarch-Calypso could be made with Reggae music and its sub-versions known as Roots-Reggae and its offshoot Dancehall-Reggae. Roots-Reggae is associated with being slower and more socially conscious and Dancehall-Reggae is associated with being more dance and party oriented (Cooper 1995; Cooper 2004).<sup>7</sup> More detailed musicological descriptions of calypso music will be given in chapter 2.

Nevertheless, if we put all the labels and interpretations aside, Roadmarch-Calypso was a music that seemingly was able to bring thousands of Arubans of all backgrounds together in a massive celebration of life. What I have seen is that Roadmarch-Calypso singers would usually sing simple and repetitive lyrics like ‘jump and wave’, ‘raise yuh hands’ and ‘feeling hot hot hot’, and had a transformative capability to command the crowd as they wished. Whatever they

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as the Roadmarch Competition is associated with the selection of the most popular composition performed during the carnival street parades and not a particular style of music (Mason 1998).

<sup>5</sup> For reasons of clarity in line with my main argument, *Calypso*, hereafter will not be written with a capital C. The term calypso is used in this study as an encompassing term which includes different styles and varieties. The terms Critical-Calypso and Roadmarch-Calypso are generic terms used locally in Aruba and will however be capitalized throughout the text. This is a stylistic choice in order to add continued emphasis on these terms as they are at the core of the main argument. All other music genre titles will not be capitalized.

<sup>6</sup> From a broader view, it could be considered the *pop music* version of Calypso.

<sup>7</sup> Roadmarch-Calypso also shared some similarities with what is known around the world as Electronic Dance Music (EDM) in that it sometimes involves large crowds and a considerable amount of dancing (Gilbert and Pearson 1999, 65).

said, the crowd would do. During public parades people of all walks of life would gather by the hundreds and party to Roadmarch-Calypso tunes behind the music truck where the band was playing (Mason 1998; Guilbault 2010). What I have also observed is that Roadmarch-Calypso music was not only popular during carnival, it was also popular during family parties where the disc jockeys and bands would reserve the final musical sets or Roadmarch-Calypso tunes so that the crowd could finalize the party in a frenzy, or commonly known in Latin America as *la hora loca*.<sup>8</sup> It was basically the climax of the evening (Winer 2008, 523). On the dance floor you would see kids, parents and grandparents alike, dancing to these infectious tunes.

### The Calypso Controversy: Critical-Calypso vs Roadmarch-Calypso

I have observed however, that even though Roadmarch-Calypso being very popular, it is often perceived by some of the older calypso aficionados as not having that same depth musically and content wise as Critical-Calypso. This particular style of music was perceived in some circles to be what some social theorists would call popular music, identified in some discourses as ‘low culture’ (Gans, 1974; Storey 2009; Fiske 2010).

The music of social critique in society and of academic value however has mostly been designated to the more traditional, ‘old school’ or ‘classic’ form of Critical-Calypso, where Caribbean academics, such as Keith Warner (1985), Gordon Rohlehr (1990), Frank, E. Manning (1990), Hollis Liverpool (2001) amongst others, often conceptualize Critical-Calypso music as one of the media used by working-class folk to criticize, and resist the unjust practices of the

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<sup>8</sup> Literal translation ‘Crazy hour’.

dominant classes in society. Especially in the areas of politics, economics, academia, religion and culture.

I will share a few short examples of what a ‘traditional’ Critical-Calypso might entail qua style and lyrics so as to provide a better feel to what I am alluding to.<sup>9</sup> Let’s look at Trinidad calypsonian Mighty Duke in his 1995 calypso entitled Don’t Destroy Calypso Music.<sup>10</sup> Here he sings in passionate defense of the traditional art-form against globalizing influences of ‘modern’ international music such as rock and rap.

*When they want to bring down a people, an old trick they all employ,  
when they want to destroy a people, the people’s culture they first destroy.  
Calypso was fearless, attacking all, and most respected by big and small,  
when suddenly out of the blue,  
they say nothing to me and you,  
I suspect a conspiracy,  
to destroy my people culturally  
.... don’t destroy calypso music*

Another example closer to home would be of Aruban calypsonian, Black Diamond. In reference to freedom of expression or perhaps the lack thereof on Aruba by the Black Aruban community, he sings a calypso in 2003 entitled Discrimination. Here he says,

*...it is only on a kaiso [calypso] stage  
a black man could really express he opinion,  
Discrimination aint done they still killing the black man  
without getting he backbone break  
or suffering a serious repercussion  
Discrimination aint done they still killing the black man  
So I going well talk about discrimination  
And let them down there say I looking confusion  
Discrimination aint done they still killing the black man*

---

<sup>9</sup> Many more song texts will be addressed all throughout the dissertation.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-2E0mEUi50I>

If we go back to Roadmarch-Calypso, we see, as indicated earlier, that its reception amongst some factions in Caribbean society has not been that welcoming. To give an example of what the lyrics of a Roadmarch-Calypso might entail, let's take a look at a popular 2018 song sung by artist Sanctuary out of the island of Barbados. His song is about his love for alcohol and what happens when he drinks too much. Note that this song is but a sample, and it does not represent all Roadmarch-Calypso's as will be demonstrated in the rest of the dissertation.

*Give me paint, give me powder<sup>11</sup>  
 Give me any fete any hour  
 Give me Gin, Johnny Walker  
 And I am not leaving till I sober  
 All I need is my jamming space,  
 So when I get drunk and misbehave  
 So if I drink too much and I fall down on the road  
 Somebody pick me up, please come and pick me up  
 So if I drink too much and I can't find my way home  
 Can somebody pick me up please come and pick me up  
 ...Cause I love me alcohol...love me alcohol...love me alcohol*

The general discourse of the factions in the Caribbean region criticizing these types of songs have suggested Roadmarch-Calypso music simply to be but a sub-strand of Critical-Calypso, and just like pop music, having a focus only on partying, drinking and little else (Hernandez-Ramdwar 2008; Guilbault 2010).<sup>1213</sup> It is seen as frivolous, unintellectual, patriarchal, and 'pleasing to the flesh' (Dawson 2011; Smith, H. M. 2004).

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UEWV3BWdQFg>

<sup>12</sup> Interestingly enough as we will see later, Critical-Calypso was seen as 'low culture' by the dominant classes. In some circles, it is now considered 'middle culture'.

<sup>13</sup> The view of Roadmarch-Calypso (soca) is similar to how jazz music was seen in the early half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Alan P Merriam's *The Anthropology of Music* (1964) suggests that 'In this period, too, jazz came to be regarded as the symbol of barbarism, primitivism, savagery, and animalism' (242).

Ethnomusicologist Jocelyne Guilbault in her article entitled *Music, Politics and Pleasure: Live Soca in Trinidad* said the following on soca (to be read as Roadmarch-Calypso in the following examples):

Since the 1990s, the commercial value of soca has been widely recognized. Soca's sociocultural and musical accomplishments, however, remain contentious and contested. Soca's so-called light lyrics and its emphasis on sexualized bodies and pleasures, associated in particular with the 1990s onward, have contributed to its dismissal by many. Judged against calypso's sociopolitical commentaries, soca has been criticized by numerous journalists, academics, calypsonians, politicians, and listeners for not engaging the political. (Guilbault 2010, 1)

Referring to the so-called 'lack of intellectual depth' of this Roadmarch-Calypso music, Trinidad calypsonian and icon Lord Pretender in a Trinidad and Tobago television program said, "*nowadays they ain't rhyming, lyrics anyhow, and the music singing for them, mostly is the music, a man sing a line, the music play five minutes...I can't understand it at all*".<sup>14</sup>

Calypsonian Lord Kitchener in his 1998 song *Old time Calypso* critiques newer versions of calypso music which he says have little content, few lyrics and meaningless dances. In this calypso, older calypsonians are petitioning him, as a calypso legend, to do something about the changes in the music. He sings,

*They leave all them calypsonians, and questioning me, Kitch...where calypso gone, since 1980...They say they tired with the stupidity they does hear, on the count of four put your hands in the air, is like they want to drive the people insane, but tell them for me he is standing for them again. We want the old time melody, I'm begging you, the old time harmony and lyrics*

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<sup>14</sup> Uploaded on youtube Mar 21, 2010 Lord Kitchener and Lord Pretender talking about the state of the art form soca vs calypso. The calypso singer vs the calypsonian.

*too, the old time story and the old time thing, like the days when good calypso reigned supreme.*<sup>15</sup>

### My Road to Damascus

To be fair, the aforementioned attitudes on Critical-Calypso and Roadmarch-Calypso music also constituted my own structural way of seeing things growing up in San Nicolas. Even as I was studying in the Netherlands during my college years, I would stay up until late at night, seeing the time difference, to follow the much-coveted annual Calypso Festival via internet radio [with slow connection and all] on my computer. To me, the witty and sharp nature of Critical-Calypso music bore much resemblance to the teachings of Jamaican Pan-Africanist Marcus Garvey when it came to ‘emancipating one’s self from mental slavery’. Initially that was also my main position as I felt the music to be a potent vehicle in tearing down the proverbial walls of ‘Babylon’ as a representation of the ‘evil empire’ of the West.<sup>16</sup>

Despite my own understanding, I was not satisfied with the arguments in the literature or the claims by local calypso music experts that traditional Critical-Calypso is the only ‘true’ music. Something told me otherwise. My understanding of what I experienced all those years ago, during that *jouvert-morning* parade was evidence of something deeper. Like I said before, the participants in that parade seemed ecstatic and had an ebullience about them. Comments from *jouvert* revelers would sound like ‘*it is a sweet feeling that you can’t describe*’ or ‘*yuh can’t put it in words*’ or ‘*they can’t stop us*’.

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<sup>15</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZEggS\\_Kj5Fo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZEggS_Kj5Fo)

<sup>16</sup> Babylon, mostly used in the Rastafarian lexicon for...one who oppresses and pushes the poor to the lowest social, political and economic level (see also Barry Chevannes 1994). ‘Down’ is stressed.

Somewhere along my reflection I had my road to Damascus moment. I started to question whether the traditional Critical-Calypso, which I upheld as the ultimate form of critique, had its limitations in its ability to really challenge the perceived injustices of society beyond the yearly carnival time frame. Perhaps, Roadmarch-Calypso, which was traditionally seen as meaningless, was actually worthy of further exploration with its so called light lyrics? Perhaps, the dancing body, immersed in a large crowd, challenged the bounds of society's physical and mental structures in much more profound ways than simply spoken language? Perhaps, Roadmarch-Calypso created a space where differences between rich and poor, local and foreigner, dark complexioned and light complexioned, gay or straight, woman, man or transgender, transsexual, upper-class and working-class, are no longer relevant, at least temporarily? All of these questions are at the foundation of my research.

I must mention here as well, that one of the main reasons I was triggered to question the effectiveness of Critical-Calypso or the lack thereof, was the fact that it primarily used *spoken word*, as a means of critiquing the perceived injustices of society (Warner, 1983; Liverpool 2008, 241-244). If we take the 'calypso as spoken word' thesis as a premise, we could argue that the use of speech has its limitations as to the effectiveness of truly bringing any message of a song across. We could then even say that Critical-Calypso perhaps operated within the confines of what culture theorists and linguists would identify as the boundaries of signification (Barthes 2001). In other words, within the boundaries of spoken language.

In this dissertation I will describe all of the workings within these so called 'boundaries of signification' with the notion 'dynamics of symbolization'. I identify the latter as a continuum of signifiers such as sound, printed word, artefacts and or images and the ways they are interpreted. I use *dynamics of symbolization* as opposed to using for example the 'symbolic



order', a concept commonly used in the field of psychoanalysis primarily by Lacanian scholars of the likes of Slavoj Zizek, Robert Geogin, and Alenka Zupancic. The utilization of the so-called symbolic order as such, in my work, may be problematic in the sense that one could interpret it as but 'one', fixed, overarching structure, signifying all that we give meaning to; which it is clearly not. I return to the discussion around, Critical-Calypso and the limitations of spoken word further in the introduction.

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In the remainder of this introduction, my aim is to present the reader with key notions and discussions that are at the foundation of this dissertation. It is somewhat lengthy but it is of utmost importance as it helps me to articulate the background and the aim of this study more distinctly to the reader. I will be introducing 1) a notion that I call Narratives of the One Happy Island, 2) the literary concepts *plaisir* and *jouissance* in relation to calypso music and 3) a concept that I call *The Breakaway*. All these notions are at the foundation of this study and will be recurring continuously throughout the entire dissertation. I also give an elaborate explanation of what this project aims to accomplish as a body of anthropological study. In the end I briefly highlight some of the methodological choices I have made and give the reader a short expose of my writing style as it relates to this project.

## **Section B:**

### **Key notions of this study**

#### Narratives of the One Happy Island

A concept that I found very useful in articulating a space with which Critical-Calypso and Roadmarch-Calypso in Aruba actively engaged, is one that I have termed Narratives of the One Happy Island. I take these narratives to be an array of stories that embody the ways Arubans identify themselves within their own community and to the outside world. I consider these narratives not to be *one* specific account, but a collection of narratives that have a specific character or ‘feel’ aligned with the idea of Aruba as a One Happy Island. In other words, they are in service of The One Happy Island ideal.

The One Happy Island notion is based on the slogan, ‘Aruba, One Happy Island’ which is used as a marketing concept, a brand, in promoting tourism on the island of Aruba (Almeyda-Ibáñez & George 2017, 14). Even the license plates issued by the government to all vehicles on the island are graced with these words. Slogans of this sort are very common in the Caribbean and represent certain types of discourses that postmodernists like Lyotard (1984) describe as the ‘overarching stories’ or ‘Grand Narratives’ in society, which in this case can be compared to overarching local identity markers. Slogans like ‘Out of Many, One People’ in Jamaica, ‘Callaloo Nation’ in Trinidad, and the ‘Friendly Island’ in St. Martin are just some examples thereof. These narratives are the major story lines that are sold to and produced in many respects by the public.

In tourism studies notions such as ‘Mc Donaldization’ or what Ritzer and Liska (1997) refer to as the ‘McDisneyization’ of tourism are common and, in some respects, comparable. For example, much like the Ford model of American mass car production, Disney theme parks and Mc Donald’s fast food restaurants, the experiences of tourists should be extremely predictable, efficient and controlled (98). Similar notions such as ‘staged authenticity’ are also comparable as it indicates that tourism settings are orchestrated to create the idea that tourist have entered a ‘back region’ even if this has not been the case (MacCannell 1973; Chhabra - 2003; Nelson, 2014).

My observation is however that the so-called ‘staged local performances’ on Aruba don’t end when tourists leave; these performances also manifest in the daily lives of locals and become part of their lived reality so to speak. In a certain sense, some of these narratives are much more like Baudrillard’s idea of the *simulacrum*, as he says,

Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal.... It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real. (Baudrillard 1981, 1-2)

The hyperreal versions of the Narratives of the One Happy Island would be much like the identification of Aruba as a happy go lucky tourist, ‘Westernized-Americanized’ *Disney-esque* destination where sayings like, ‘in good or in bad times, we are the One Happy Island,’ or ‘*Bon Bini*, welcome to paradise man!’ are often heard. Many Caribbean scholars also describe these types of narratives as ‘edenic’ in their portrayal of paradise (Jaffe 2009). Cultural Anthropologist Francio Guadeloupe (2008) in his work on St. Martin (Dutch and French Caribbean), describes similar narratives as being very pragmatic with the tourist economy as the main catalyst in their construction. Bits and pieces of histories, whether real or imagined, are amalgamated, commodified and sold to cater to the tourist industry with the help of tour guides. Tourist

workers are fully aware of this scene and are in on the game so to speak. If tourists say ‘jump,’ locals ask ‘how high?’ and if they say ‘run,’ locals ask ‘how fast?’

In some of these Narratives of the One Happy Island, youngsters in high school speak Hollywood-American English to their peers, copy the supposed lifestyles of the rich and famous (think *the Kardashians* here), where people privately have bank loans up to their eye balls to ‘keep up with the Joneses’. Some of these narratives project Aruba as a friendly nation where we proudly speak four languages, there is no discrimination against skin color, class, gender, sexuality, region, origin, language and religion. In some of these narratives, Aruba is a highly developed nation, where there is no poverty, universal healthcare and one of the best education systems in the world where Arubans proudly proclaim, ‘*we hebben hetzelfde onderwijssysteem als in Nederland, hoor*’ [we have the same education system as in the Netherlands]. In some these narratives Aruba has one of the highest GDP’s in the Caribbean and are the leaders in Sustainable Development and Green energy technology. Last but not least, in some of these narratives we are of a nation that likes to party and have a good time but within the ‘limits of decency’.

As mentioned before, these so called ‘simulations’ of some of these Narratives of the One Happy Island are perhaps not only restricted to the realm of tourism. It can be argued that it has even extended to the point that the social challenges of present day and the tragedies of the history of Aruba are perhaps dealt with in a particular way; sometimes even omitted, consciously and unconsciously. The local expression, ‘*what you don’t know aint going kill you*’ speaks very much to this idea.

This illustration below along with some other observations may provide a better context of some of the ways I have observed, some of the Narratives of the One Happy Island play out in the public sphere.



**Figure 1 Street name board in San Nicolas Aruba**

Though I was born and raised in Aruba it never once occurred to me that the street name where the San Nicolas office of the *Biblioteca Nacional di Aruba* (National library of Aruba) is housed is called Peter Stuyvesantstraat [street]. Peter Stuyvesant is prominent historical figure in the history of the Americas and in his tenure at the Dutch West India Company (WIC), he was stationed in places like Brazil and Curacao. He eventually became the 7<sup>th</sup> Director-General of the colony of *Nieuw Nederland*. This territory would eventually become New York when the English took over in 1664. In places such as New York, the Netherlands and the Dutch Caribbean schools, neighborhoods and streets are named after him (Kruijtzter 2008; Oostindie & Roitman 2016).

The irony of this story is that Stuyvesants' history in the Dutch Caribbean and the America's is checkered at best as he is associated with white supremacy, colonialism and slavery. In recent years in the Dutch media his hero status has been called into question along

with other prominent figures of the Dutch East India Company such as Jan Pieterszoon Coen and van Heutsz by some academics and activists, in the Netherlands and Curacao. For example, in 2011, in Curacao, a prominent secondary school with a long history on the island which carried his name was changed in place of a prominent local figure.

My experiences in Aruba show the exact opposite as these types of topics very rarely get attention. To my knowledge this particular street name, Peter Stuyvesantstraat, has never been brought up in the public sphere for debate. What is even more ironic is that on the board of the street name the Aruba slogan, 'One Happy Island' is printed and also the name of San Nicolas, the district on the island with the largest black population.

Another example that would be comparable is Aruba's complex and ambiguous history with African slavery. In almost all the territories in the Dutch kingdom, including the Netherlands, in the past years official ceremonies are held in some capacity on July 1<sup>st</sup> commemorating the abolition of slavery; *keti koti* [the cutting of the chains]. Speeches and lectures are held at slavery monuments, articles are published in the media, debates are held on the legacy of slavery and discussions on topics such as reparations. In Aruba however up to today, there aren't any official ceremonies nor official statements made by the government on this dark chapter of our history. The fact is that at the time of the emancipation of slavery in the Dutch Caribbean, approximately 20 percent of the population on Aruba were registered as slaves (Alofs 2013). It is as if that part of our history has never existed. For example, in 2018, a San Nicolas business owner and community leader mentioned in a Facebook post on July 1<sup>st</sup>:

Emancipation Day today. Liberation of Slavery. Remembered worldwide. Suriname, Sint Maarten, Bonaire, Curacao, St. Eustatius, Saba, Netherlands, America and our little

Aruba that boasts as been a cultural melting pot, NADA, NOTHING NOT EVEN A MENTION.<sup>17</sup>

Another local opinion maker reacted to this post by saying:

I was not to any *Dera gai* celebration [popular local harvest celebration] last week but Who went told me our minister of Culture visited all the activities and today a week later, she is *spoorloos*, had expect more from her as a female, shame shame shame, but wait till end of the year you will see her welcoming *Sinterklaas* and his *Zwarte Pieten*, that racial celebration yes they want to pass on to the younger generation.

To be clear, these examples do not mean that Arubans are not critical of these matters such as the debates around slavery and the controversial St Nicholas and Black Pete celebrations or that there are no critical voices opposing some of the island's taboos in favor of some of the Narratives of the One Happy Island. There was, but my impression was that these voices always seemed to be countered with answers that were in service of our main industry which is *tourism*. One would easily be labelled as being negative if one is overly critical. Tourism is the island's main source of income, yearly receiving over a million visitors, and thus anything that would cause a disbalance was to be avoided at all cost (cbs.aw).

I will share some examples on how The One Happy Island notion comes up in public debates and how often times the Aruban public engages herewith.

On my way to work in the morning, I usually listen to local radio talk shows, '*boca na palabra*' [mouth at word] and '*turno liber*' [free turn] in search for public opinion on trending news. Much of the grievances of the callers are to do with politics, cost of living and social issues on the island. On occasion some callers would make remarks on international affairs. Every now and again the notion of The One Happy Island comes up. The way it is mostly cited is in a sarcastic manner. For example, I remember a female caller commenting in a negative way

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/soakindsoca/posts/10156317227611427>

about the Prime Minister and his claim of Aruba being a 5-star destination for all its citizens. The caller said ‘if this is the case, why is my water and electrical bill so high, why am I barely making it with the little pension I am receiving, why is criminality so high and why are there so many Colombian and Venezuelan illegal immigrants on the island’. The caller finalized her statement by saying ‘*esaki ta un one happy island di berdad*’ [this is indeed a One Happy Island]. Not too long after another caller called in and said ‘*hopi hende na Aruba ta negatief, nos no sa con bendiciona nos ta. Si bo compara Aruba cu resto di Caribe y Latino America, nos tin e hopi bon... si Aruba ta asina malo dicon tin tanto Latino, Hatiano y Jamaicino kier bin kinan*’ [people are very negative, people in Aruba do not know how blessed we are. If you compare Aruba with the rest of the Caribbean and Latin America we are well off...if Aruba was that bad, why is it that we have so many Latino’s, Haitians and Jamaicans whom want to establish here]

A similar observation is from an online discussion on in 2017 related to a tragic case that shocked Aruba in its entirety. The case was of a women’s boyfriend whom killed her two children and buried one of them in a remote place. There was national outrage on the island as many persons in the community felt that the social institutions whom needed to protect these kids failed miserably. Some people remarked that ‘we failed as a community’ as topics such as domestic violence, child abuse, drug and alcohol abuse, poverty and the like were all taboo. As persons were sharing their opinions in different languages in the online thread on Facebook what caught my attention was when someone remarked ‘*laga nos no hiba e discucion aki na Ingles pasobra hende di tur parti mundo por compronde nos*’ [let us not have this discussion in English because people from around the world could understand us]. This as if to say that it would damage our brand if Aruba gets a bad name abroad. After all this is an island that had to deal



with the consequences a massive anti Aruba media campaign in the early 2000s in the United States after the disappearance of high school student Natalie Holloway (Parks 2009).

To conclude this paragraph we can say that, as detailed in the earlier paragraphs, that in Aruban society Critical-Calypso has traditionally been a critical mouthpiece against many of the Narratives of the One Happy Island, singing ‘truths’ that challenge this so-called hyperreal rendition of Aruba's realities. The basic role of the Critical-Calypsonian is to expose what is thought by some to be a simulacrum, and reveal the true story behind the curtain. They were tasked with deconstructing ‘façade’ of some of the Grand Narratives of the One Happy Island, broadcasting the Petit-subaltern-narratives, and placing them in opposition to the Grand Narratives.

### *The Breakaway, Plaisir and Jouissance*

What Roadmarch-Calypso seemed to do, from my impression as a spectator and participant, showed many similarities with Michael Bakhtin’s interpretation of the carnivalesque. Bakhtin described the carnivalesque as a period during carnival or carnival-like-events, where ‘there is a temporary suspension of all hierarchic distinctions, and barriers among men and of certain norms and prohibitions of usual life’ (Bakhtin 1984, 15). This upside-down turning of society also known as inversion, was a moment where for example the poor and the working class would reverse roles with the elite during a period of festivities.

Victor Turner (1969) and his interpretation of notions such as *communitas* and liminality in his studies on rites of passage are also comparable in many ways.<sup>18</sup> Turner gives a description in which one could see its comparisons. He says,

I have used the term "anti-structure,"...to describe both liminality and what I have called "communitas." I meant by it not a structural reversal...but the liberation of human capacities of cognition, affect, volition, creativity, etc., from the normative constraints incumbent upon occupying a sequence of social statuses (*From Ritual to Theater*, 44).

Turner uses characteristics such as absence of status, nakedness, minimization of gender differences, disregard for personal appearance, no distinctions of wealth and sacredness amongst others to characterize this experience of 'anti-structure' (Turner 1969, 106).

I return to a discussion on the carnivalesque, *communitas* and liminality in relation to similar notions I use in the next paragraphs, and argue why I have opted for the usage of another concept to give meaning to my work. However, what I will focus on in this paragraph is another notion used in the local context.

In studying this particular phenomenon related to the experience of Roadmarch-Calypso in Aruba, one notion seemed to continuously appear in my mind, *Breakaway*. *Breakaway* is an English Creole (Caribbean English) notion, derived from the term 'Break Away' used by Roadmarch-Calypso singers in Aruba and in the rest of the Caribbean to indicate the climax, *mambo*, of the song where everyone in the crowd is encouraged to 'let loose' and 'free up' or what can be described as 'break' with the indirect experience of reality through the dynamics of symbolization (Winer 2008, 523). In the Aruban English speaking community expressions such as *that was a sweet breakaway*', *she breakingaway in the party*' are very common. In a sense, it seemed like another gear, a sixth gear, so to speak within the Roadmarch-Calypso space.

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<sup>18</sup> Notions worked on previously in some ways by Arnold van Gennep (1960).

The feeling or experience of the *breakaway*, shares family resemblances with certain phenomena in popular culture, reality TV, music, sports, sexual entertainment and religion.<sup>19</sup> Some examples hereof might help us to get a broader scope of this notion to a wider public.

Donna Hope (2009) elaborating on the works of Carolyn Cooper (2004) for example, points out that in dancehall reggae ‘soundclashes’ in Jamaica people go to unbelievable heights when performing in these spaces. Huge speakers are mounted in any open area of the neighborhood and people from all around participate in the *clash*. Dances with names like ‘*tek weh yuhself*’, ‘*slow wine*’, and ‘*bruck it down*’ which are performed in hot spaces, where sweat drenched female bodies in ‘*pum pum shorts*’ [very short pants barely covering the buttocks area] gyrate on males and females alike can be observed. Hope describes the dancehall as ‘a place of catharsis, where people go and enjoy themselves, release tensions and have fun’.

Spiritual Baptists, Pentecostals and other charismatic religious movements (to name a few) in the region are also known for their transcendental experiences where in religious gatherings members ‘speak in tongues’ [glossolalia] (Wariboko 2014). Different studies have described how church members are led by the worship team who gradually take the congregation into uncharted territories. Through the accompaniment of live music, singing, dancing and the repetition of lyrics and chants this state is induced. I have heard church members describe this feeling as ‘being in love for the first time’ or ‘laying in the arms of your lover’ or ‘having butterflies in your stomach’. In her book entitled *My Faith; Spiritual Baptist Christian*, Teacher Hazel Ann Gibbs de Peza describes speaking in tongues or talking to the unknown as:

A Spiritual Gift listed in the Bible in 1 Cor. 12 as one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, when believers speak in languages unknown to them in their normal speech. This is done on two levels among Spiritual Baptists: As prayer talking to God and as Spiritual

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<sup>19</sup> In the chapter on Roadmarch-Calypso and the *breakaway* a brief differentiation will be made between some of these examples and the specific *breakaway jouissance* version in Aruba.

conversation between members who are transversing the Spiritual Realm. (Gibbs de Peza 2007, 75)

Following this same line of thought, Van de Port, in his studies on ‘transcendence’ in the Afro Brazilian religion Candomblé in Bahia, has worked with a similar concept called ‘the-rest-of-what-is’. He describes it as...‘the “surplus” of our reality definitions, the “beyond” of our horizons of meaning, that which needs to be excluded as “impossible”, “unknown”, “mere fantasy” or “absurd” for our worldview to make sense’ (Van de Port 2011, 18).

French scholar Roland Barthes, elaborates on the notion *jouissance* which I believe is in some measure relatable to the *breakaway*. I have taken a liking to this notion because of Barthes’ literary background and because of its usefulness in the context of calypso music. I will therefore elaborate on this notion in more detail.

In Barthes’ work we see *jouissance* described as the highest form of ‘joy’ or ‘bliss’, or in some translations as a ‘symbolically unmediated sexual orgasm’ (Howard 1975). In Barthes’ publication *The Pleasure of Text* he alludes to *jouissance* as being ‘totally free’ but yet ‘indescribable in words’. In other words, as being in a state where all ‘barriers, classes, exclusions, syncretism do not exist’ a space where one accepts every charge of ‘illogicality, incongruity and where one remains passive in the face of Socratic irony and legal terrorism’ (Barthes 1975, 3).<sup>20</sup>

In his publication *The Pleasure of Text*, two forms of texts are his principle focus, what he calls: *readerly [lisible] text* and *writerly [scriptable] text*. Barthes relates our experience of *readerly texts* to a state of *plaisir* or pleasurable enjoyment. This is a passive form of enjoyment

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<sup>20</sup> For a broader theorization also see for example the general works of Slavoj Zizek and Julia Kristeva; somewhat different emphasis from the Barthesian articulation of *jouissance* (which is predominately of ‘ecstatic’ enjoyment) but rather of the *abject* and that of *unbearable pain* (Gilbert and Pearson 1999, 65).

where the reader just accepts the ‘pre-packaged’ message that the writer wants to convey. This text can basically be interpreted as intellectually unchallenging.

The other form of text, *writerly text*, he compares to being in a state of blissful enjoyment or *jouissance*. He describes this type of text as being active and a type of text that invites readers to become co-creators of the meanings of the text. In other words, he invites readers to become creators of their own stories. It goes beyond the message the writer wants to convey. Instead, it has the ability to convert the reader from consumer or patient to creator or agent in the process of meaning making. In a sense he invites the reader to enter into what Bakhtin (1981) refers to as a *dialogical* and *dialectical* relationship to text, de-populating it of the author’s intentions and repopulating it with the reader’s intentions. In a *writerly text* in a sense, authors lose all symbolic ownership and symbolic control over their work, but ignite a fire within readers that is beyond ownership and limits.

In bringing this discussion back to Aruban calypso music, we can say that Barthes’ *readerly text* in many respects can be compared to Critical-Calypso and *plaisir* while *writerly text* on the other hand can be compared to Roadmarch-Calypso, the *breakaway* and *jouissance*. The impression should however not be that the above are fixed categorizations and no variations are possible. There probably are variations, and therefore, I would consider these as ‘temporary categorizations’ as a point of departure where along the way in this dissertation, new discoveries are possibly made. However, I do believe that these notions provide a good basis for initially understanding the fundamentally different ways in which Critical-Calypso on the one hand and Roadmarch-Calypso on the other engage with the Narratives of the One Happy Island in Aruba.

The family resemblances perhaps lie in the observation that Critical-Calypso for the most part is very text oriented so to speak. Critical-Calypsonians have traditionally taken on the role of

spokesperson for society and defender of the marginalized through spoken word. In other words, the calypso comes from such a long tradition where it is common for critique to be uttered at for example the elites in society. One could argue that the audience eventually becomes desensitized to what is being presented by the calypsonian. Perhaps the Critical-Calypsonian's role is scripted to the point there is barely an element of surprise anymore.

If the audience knows more or less what is about to happen, it fits perfectly in what could be called a 'licensed affair' in the period of carnival. That is a 'permissible rupture of hegemony' where the pent-up steam of the poor and working class could be released temporarily as a necessary phase of the continuation of the oppressive regime (Eagleton 2009, 148).<sup>21</sup> In other words a temporary dose of 'manufactured outrage'. So as expected during the carnival period, the carnival characters such as the Prince and the *Pancho* [court jester] get the key to city, and are expected to reign during the festivities.<sup>22</sup> In this phase, tricksters are expected to play their 'tricks', participants are expected to put on costumes, wear masks similar to Venetian carnivals and African traditions, dance enthusiastically, transform themselves into kings and queens, represent ancient kingdoms and march elegantly through the streets much like carnivals around the globe. In this 'carnavalesque-licensed-affair', the Critical-Calypsonian is also expected, even encouraged to critique the government and the ruling classes. Being critical is basically, their job. However, with the help of government subsidies and sponsorship, that over time have ensured that the critique advanced by the Critical-Calypsonians remain within the limits of permissible dissent.

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<sup>21</sup> For some perspective and critique on the 'steam valve' explanation see Scott, James C. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990. Also Cohen, Abner. *Masquerade Politics. Explorations in the Structure of Urban Cultural Contexts*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

<sup>22</sup> Similar to what is known as *Prins* carnaval in the South of the Netherlands or the *Prinz* in the carnivals of Cologne Germany.

Roadmarch-Calypto on the other hand arguably produces a ‘blissful experience’ which upon initial observation is more like our experience of what Barthes calls a ‘writerly text’ as it breaks away from the text itself and instead uses the *body* through dance and music as a possible means of ecstatic experience and enjoyment. It arguably renders our programmed systems of signification useless and irrelevant.

### *Jouissance* vs Communitas and Liminality

The question at this point may be, what is the difference between Barthes’ notion of *jouissance* and similar notions such as carnivalesque, communitas and liminality in relation to Roadmarch-Calypto. Why do I give certain interpretations of the notion *jouissance* a slight edge over let’s say the others just mentioned? I will use Turner’s interpretation of communitas and liminality as an example to speak to this query.

For good measure, I do not ignore these concepts completely as they are very much a part of the vocabulary, I use to give meaning to my work. I make the case however that Turner’s description of communitas and liminality as having some practical limitations.

I place my argument in the so-called ontological turn in anthropology where the ethnographer is encouraged not to place beforehand that which is being studied into theoretical notions of one’s own making. Rather, it encourages us to challenge ourselves to look at the world from the perspective of the locals. In other words, to let the empirical findings in a sense guide the process and not vice versa (Latour 1993; Holbraad & Pederson 2011). This also pertains to how locals make sense of the world including their views on society, nature and the metaphysical (Jackson and Piette 2015; Van de Port 2015). This should be evident in one’s writing no matter how eccentric we think it might be.

Thus, I see *communitas* and liminality as still being very functional theorizations of ritual processes by academics from their ‘own’ perspective. In other words, a description and interpretation of an orchestrated event according to a specific structural process. In the case of *communitas* and liminality, there is structure in the context of a ritual in which there are specific phases like for example what is called the triad of transition: separation, margin (liminal phase) and aggregation (Turner 1967). These phases of transition are often also applied in other cultural contexts as well indicating from my perspective some form of universality. Turner also uses notions such as ‘antistructure’ to equate *communitas* and liminality yet in a way, it is kind of contradictory as it speaks of ‘antistructure’ in a ‘structural’ way. In other words, it speaks of certainty in an uncertain process.

Much of Turner’s ethnography is also interpretive in style and is filled with generalizations. Though perhaps not his intention, it runs the risk of disregarding ‘local knowledge’ as a viable means of knowing. Even if concepts are used similar to that of locals, they are often used to fit the narrative of the ethnographer whom already has framed theoretical notions from their own perspective on a larger scale to fit their academic discipline. For example, anthropologists use anthropological methods and fit their findings within that frame even if they claim to be participant observers.

Then one might ask, by using Barthes’ interpretation of *jouissance* are you not doing the same as Turner, Bakhtin and others? The truth of the matter is that *jouissance* is indeed a similar notion engaged with in similar capacities. This puts me in a challenging position because as long as I use language and theoretical concepts to give meaning to phenomena, I will remain inhibited by my own interpretations. One way of maybe dealing with this challenge is the practice of not



applying theory but critically engaging with it. Meaning not using theory as the holy grail but as an open-ended vehicle in exploring uncharted territories.

Taking the above challenging queries into account, I believe that Barthes's interpretation of *jouissance* has its limitations but also its strengths when looking at phenomena such as Roadmarch-Calypto and the *breakaway*. Its limitations are in the same vein as the above arguments. Its strength lies however in Barthes comparison of *jouissance* to *writerly text*, a concept elaborated on in detail in the previous paragraphs. *Writerly texts* allow the participant to actively engage in meaning making when for example Roadmarch-Calypto is heard. The participant has the space to actually 'write' their own story in the ongoing process during the dance and not follow passively what is presented. The individual may experience *jouissance* completely different to their neighbor. This means that no two stories are the same. The outcomes are not always predictable if compared to the phases found in Turners' interpretation of the ritual.

Even with the space *writerly text* allows, it is very risky to use an absolutist vocabulary to describe an open-ended experience such as *jouissance*. Therefore I will also refrain from describing *jouissance*, and the *breakaway* as being 'the real', 'the truth', the 'ultimate experience' and the like. I will leave this description to the reader.

### Roadmarch-Calypto, the Body and the Dance

What I also found important to keep in mind are the notions of body and dance. From my observations throughout the years, we see that the body and the dance play important roles in Roadmarch-Calypto. We can perhaps even argue that 'the body' in Roadmarch-Calypto can be

understood as the ‘existential ground of culture - not as an object that is ‘good to think’, but as a subject that is ‘necessary to be’ (Csordas 1993, 135). In other words, the body is in this context understood from an existential or a lived experience rather than a structural cognitive experience.

For this dissertation it means that we have to take the body seriously as it might enlighten us with new discoveries and may provide more profound ways of ‘knowing’ than if compared to traditional language. For example, Michael Jackson in his work on the ‘knowledge of the body’ (1983), argues that the body should be seen as a viable means of ‘knowing’. The argument is here that we must attempt to look at the body in its most ‘natural’ state in so far possible and seek to explore what it might tell us about life. I would say to keep in mind that this type of ‘body gaze’ would not provide all the answers though, because to a certain extent the anthropological exercise I am engaging with still remains a practice of interpretation. Nevertheless at least it challenges us not to take the body for granted or ignore it completely.

By extension, what is also worth looking at in this study is the ‘moving body’ through dance. It is interesting to look at what dance might tell us. In her publication *Dance and Politics*, Dana Mills says quite interestingly that,

Dance is an embodied language, a form of communication between bodies in motion. As such, it adheres to different rules and structures than those of verbal language. Understanding dance as a method of communication brings into the political conversations between those subjects who, through an embodied method of self-expression, were not listened to when politics is understood solely through verbal language. Dance is the way those subjects perform their equality to those expressing themselves through verbal language. (Mills 20016, 24)

Looking at the dancing body and what it might possibly represent during the Roadmarch-Calypto may even indicate it to be political. Something that Roadmarch-Calypto has been criticized for as described in the previous paragraphs, for completely ignoring. In reference to the body, dance and the political, Mills says,

Hence, dance and politics are always already intertwined. Dancing bodies affect bodies in the audience; all of those bodies are political entities. Understanding dance as including linguistic and communicative features within it, as being part of a whole world, allows the study to expand into understanding issues and ideas articulated through moving bodies. (2)

On a somewhat relatable note I should also mention that Roadmarch-Calypto shared many similarities on a global level with Dance Music. For a global comparison I make reference to the following quotes. John Gill in his book, *Queer Noises*, make a link between Dance Music and *jouissance* as he says,

Dance Music as it is perceived now- soul, disco, funk, techno and the many mansions of house- is, I believe the one form of music which, even in its most degraded form, is bound up in something that closely resembles Roland Barthes' notion of *jouissance*, that is, rapture, bliss or transcendence. (Gill 1995:134)

Also, Gilbert and Pearson, *referencing Gill*, in a similar vein,

...everything about the contemporary dance music-drug experience is organized around the pursuit of a certain kind of ecstasy: waves of undifferentiated physical and emotional pleasure; a sense of immersion in a communal moment, wearing the parameters of one's individuality are broken down by the shared throbbing of the bass drum; an acute experience of music in all its sensuality – its shimmering arpeggios, soaring-washes, abrasives squelches, crackles and pops; and incessant movement forward, in all directions, nowhere; the bodily irresistibility of funk; the inspirational smiles of strangers, the awesome familiarity of friends, the child-like feeling of perfect safety at the edge of oblivion; a delicious surrender to cliché. (Gilbert and Pearson 1999, 64)<sup>23 24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> The use of drugs, as a culture is not normally associated with Roadmarch-Calypto and carnival in Aruba as specifically EDM. The use of alcohol (and food) is very common and is seen as an essential part of the experience. Many Roadmarch-Calypto songs make reference to spirits (alcohol) such as rum and (fire water) whiskey etc.

<sup>24</sup> For a global comparison between Critical-Calypto and Roadmarch-Calypto see Jon Stratton's 2007 publication, *Constructing an Avant Garde: Australian Popular Music and the Experience of Pleasure* where he applies the Barthesian interpretation of *plaisir* and *jouissance* to different strands of 'Alternative Rock'.

## Section C:

### Research Aim, Style and Outline

#### Relevance of this work

Having shed light on the calypso controversy in Aruba as well as some of the key notions at the heart of this dissertation, the question perhaps that still remains, how does this dissertation concretely bring about different understandings to the existing theorization of such notions as *plaisir* and *jouissance* and how my research might help to fine-tune these theories? Also, how does studying the calypso controversy in Aruba contribute to the expansion and the depth of general Caribbean studies and specifically Dutch Caribbean anthropology?<sup>25</sup> I'll summarize the aims of this dissertation as follows.

This dissertation seeks to:

1. Expand the scope and depth of Dutch Caribbean anthropology [this is the first and biggest aim thus is explained here in more detail]

Dutch anthropologist Harry Hoetink (1985) recognized some time ago that Caribbean scholars were often specialists uniquely in the English, Spanish, French, US or the Dutch Caribbean, but knew very little about developments outside of their particular sub areas. In reference to many specialists in the anglophone Caribbean, he makes an interesting observation:

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<sup>25</sup> I limit myself to the current 6 Dutch Caribbean islands, their diaspora communities in the Netherlands and around the world. Some studies and examples on Surinam (a former Dutch colony) are referenced but is not my main focus.

Generally dealing with the British or commonwealth Caribbean, they have taught the English speaking public everywhere to associate the Caribbean primarily with its English speaking areas. This bias is found among scholars as well, for many “Caribbeanists” suffer from a *single-language* focus and some are apt to make Caribbean-wide generalizations based on comparative research in, for example, Jamaica and St. Kitts, leaving the study of the Hispanic islands to another academic tribe, the Latin Americanists (67-57)

Upon looking through the many monographs on the Caribbean, including the publications of E. Williams (1984), Mintz & Price (1985), Mintz (1989), Sheller (2003), Hillman & D’ Agostino (2003), G. Lewis, (2004), Moya Pons (2008), Palmie & Scarano (2011) and Higman (2011) there is very little to be found on the Dutch Caribbean islands themselves besides that of the territory of Surinam. If at all the islands are mentioned, the information presented is often questionable and or sometimes downright inaccurate. For examples continuously, it is said that the main language of communication in the Dutch Caribbean is Dutch; which is of course not the case. Many studies also start off with the claim that there is very little left of Amerindian heritage in the Caribbean; which is also very much debated (Pesoutova, J., & Hofman, C. L. 2016). The above concerns are also brought up by Dutch Caribbean scholars such as Michiel Baud (2002), Gert Oostindie (2003), Allen (2012) and the like.<sup>26</sup>

Consider this project an attempt in responding to this query.

Dutch Caribbean studies as a field of research on its own can be problematic as it is always a discussion on which works and researchers should be included in this group. Do they include scholars on the islands of the Dutch Caribbean, the Dutch mainland or the America’s and

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<sup>26</sup> Much has been written on the post-war decolonisation in the Caribbean, but rarely from a truly comparative perspective, and – apart from Dutch language studies – seldom with serious attention to the former Dutch colonies of Suriname, the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba (Oostindie 2003, 10).

furthermore, what disciplines to include? If I limit myself to the works produced by researchers in the current Dutch kingdom, we see that it is not that scholarly works have been completely absent, but my critique is that they have been mostly focused on specific areas, have mostly emanated from universities in the Netherlands and they have mostly stayed within the Dutch language enclave. Some of these limitations also have to do with a lack of a proper research infrastructure in the Dutch Caribbean.

The areas of focus of Dutch Caribbean studies tend to include colonial history, Afro-Atlantic slavery, migration, politics, law, socio-cultural issues, multiculturalism, religion, gender, the Dutch Antillean diaspora in the Netherlands, literature and language. Some of the more widely cited authors include Harry Hoetink, Gert Oostindie and Alex van Stipriaan. These names are by no means all-encompassing but give an indication of the output, perceived quality, and the reach of their work. For a broader context, I list other researchers and writers in the notes; some of whom will be also cited in this work.<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, my other great concern with the output of Dutch Caribbeanist in general is that there seems to be very little focus on music and cultural expression on the islands themselves, written by researchers whom have been immersed in these societies longitudinally; not just for short fieldwork trips. Specifically, with regard to the area of calypso music and carnival there is an enormous scarcity. Some of whom who have done work in this area include Victoria Razak (1997) whom has presented a first ethnography of Aruban carnival, Rosemary Allen (1998) whom has documented the influence of English Caribbean migrants and the

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<sup>27</sup> Peter Verton , Rêne Romer, A.F Paula, Rosemarijn Hoeftte, Inge Klinkers, Rivke Jaffe, Paula Kibbelaar, Francio Guadeloupe, Luc Alofs, Wim Rutgers, Michiel van Kempen, Angela Roe, Michiel Baud, Armando Lampe, Joyce Pereira, Renee Rosalia, Frank Martinus Arion, Valika Smeulders, Ronald Severing, Artwell Cain, Gloria Wekker, Valdemar Marcha, Rhoda Arrindel, Aspha Bijnaar, Piet Emmer, Sandew Hira, Lesana Sekou, Charles do Rego, Margo Groenewoud, Richinel Ansano.

carnival of Curacao, Herman Tak (1997) whom has delved deeper in the Dutch Antillean summer carnival in Netherlands and its Curacao and Aruba roots, Francio Guadeloupe (2008) whom has looked at calypso music disc jockeys on St Maarten/St Martin and their ability to create a space of inclusivity and Charissa Granger whom has looked at Steelpan and Tambu music and the sonic space they create for the coming together of people of diverse backgrounds (2018). Dutch anthropologist Peter van Kooningsbruggen's, 1997 seminal work on carnival, calypso and ethnicity in Trinidad has also contributed greatly to this body of knowledge. Even though his work does not deal with the Dutch Caribbean specifically, it gives us much insight in a general sense on calypso music. His findings have also been cited in wider Caribbean studies by calypso scholars in the Caribbean.

Of all the names mentioned above, it has been Victoria Razak, a British anthropologist working in the US, that has dedicated the most time to Aruban carnival and calypso music. I consider her work a first serious attempt in documenting Aruba's carnival and the calypso music scene. The shortcomings of her study are however methodological as many of her descriptions and interpretations can be called into question. For example, besides the errors in the names of the calypsonians, there are many errors as it relates to the translations and interpretations of the calypso lyrics. This is perhaps having to do with her not speaking the language thus not always knowing the subtle nuances of the way people go about their lives.

As a native anthropologist, a concept I elaborate on in the next chapter, I hope to present an ethnography that is more reflective of the way locals carry out their lives.

2. To shed light on different ways of engaging the political

This point coincides with the previous. It seeks to explore the different ways in which Roadmarch-Calypso might actually engage the political. That is looking at music, politics and critique in nontraditional ways; something Roadmarch-Calypso has been repeatedly criticized for by the traditional calypso fraternity.

3. To engage with the notion of creolization in different ways

Though not a new concept in Caribbean studies, I attempt to explore creolization as a notion that has characterized the Caribbean region in many ways and in doing so seek to discover what new and different ways there might be in engaging with creolization. Thus, what it might tell us about Caribbean ways of looking at the world. This point will be elaborated on in chapter 3.

4. To present an ethnography, qua language and writing style, in ways that is more reflective of the way Arubans give meaning to their lives

What I seek to present is a writing style that is closest to the speech of the locals in the research. I present quotes, expressions, songs and dialogue in the local languages of Arubans; namely Papiamentu, English and English Creole, Spanish and Dutch. Even though I provide translations I wanted to stay as close as possible to how local would express themselves. As these languages are also my own this may facilitate the process. Sociolinguistic research has shown, how much gets ‘lost in translation’ if local dialects and linguistic expressions are not sufficiently taken into account (Cornips, De Rooij & Stengs 2017).

I elaborate on my writing in the next paragraphs.

I am acutely aware of the task I have set before me. This dissertation may seem daunting, when we consider the long and respected tradition of calypso research in Caribbean scholarship,



which has mainly emerged from the island nation of Trinidad and Tobago, considered to be the motherland of calypso music. Any scholarly work that complicates Critical-Calypso status as ‘the voice of the oppressed’, or ‘the people’s spokesperson’, or ‘Trinidadian music’, would probably be met (perhaps rightfully so) with many frowns. Nevertheless, I think it is important to open up different perspectives concerning the calypso music genre and its varieties such as Roadmarch-Calypso, and provide an expansion and diversification of the existing body of knowledge in this field. I join, the likes of Francio Guadeloupe (2010), Susan Harewood (2005) and Curwen Best (2000) in exploring more ways of ‘living’ beyond solely Afrocentric and Eurocentric singular modes and by extension other constructed binaristic categories using the Critical-Calypso and Roadmarch-Calypso experiences to, as Harewood says, ‘make ourselves more open to the range of voices colliding and crisscrossing through Caribbean cultural forms’ (194).

### Note on methodology

As said in the opening line this dissertation represents the outcome of a longitudinal anthropological study that started thirteen years ago, in 2005 at the University of Utrecht as a pre-master thesis. In the subsequent years the data has grown richer eventually becoming the foundation for my Master’s thesis and now my PhD dissertation. As part of this journey, I’ve visited places like Trinidad, Grenada, US Virgin Islands, Saint Martin, Barbados, Costa Rica in search for the more intricate aspects of calypso music in the Caribbean: the different styles, the lyrics, the topics, the usage of language and the significance of calypso to these communities.

This is of course in addition to the in-depth research that I have done on my home island of Aruba over ten years.

I mainly collected my data by using an array of anthropological tools broadly categorized along these lines; interviews, observations, song text documentations/ video and audio documentation, traditional and social media documentation and literature.

The interviews were taken from a broad perspective in that they not only included planned and structured interviews but also many unplanned and unstructured conversations and interactions in various places where locals traversed such as supermarkets, street corners, child day care parking lots to mention a few. The groups I interviewed included calypsonians songwriters, musicians, calypso disk jockeys, scholars in the field, organic intellectuals, conference attendees, calypso music fans and critics, event organizers, carnival participants and calypso judges. Much of my data I also gathered through organizing calypso related events. From the held lectures and conversations during these events, much valuable data was also gathered.

The observations were also approached from a similar perspective as the interviews. It included mostly participant observations and sessions of ‘deep hanging out’ with calypsonians.<sup>28</sup> I especially attended numerous band trainings, calypso festivals and carnival activities.

Song text documentation was also a major source of my data. Because the songs were never documented in an official manner, most of the songs I had to transcribe myself. This had its challenges as some were of poor sound quality. This also counts for the video and audio documentation I used. I listened and analyzed hundreds of hours of calypso recordings and video that were available via personal archives and YouTube and other online streaming platforms. I

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<sup>28</sup> For more on the notion of ‘Deep hanging out’ as a methodology in Cultural Anthropology see Walmsley (2016).

also made use of the documentary on calypso music produced by Dutch Caribbean filmmaker Sharelly Emanuelson called *Mighty lords Kings and Queens; calypso and the politics of recognition* (2015). It is one of the few locally produced documentaries detailing the lives of Aruban calypsonians. I participated in this project as the main researcher thus much of the data generation I was a part of. I also listened to many hours of local talk show programs on carnival as well as local calypso music programs such as those of Ivo Yanez and Ruben Garcia. These are programs where persons could call in and share their opinions on the latest developments related calypso music, carnival and the like.

Regarding written media documentation, I looked at both traditional and non-traditional media. I've analyzed many hardcopy and online newspaper articles related to calypso music on Aruba. I have also followed many of the writings such as blogs and comments on calypso music on social media such as Facebook. I followed the postings of calypsonians, media personalities, critics and fans. I found social media to be much more up to date with the current debates on calypso music than for example traditional media as it had less gatekeepers involved in getting one's opinion to the fore.

In addition, profound literature analyses were carried out on many of the studies on calypso music which were mostly found in a broad range of disciplines such as cultural studies, literary studies, anthropology, Caribbean studies, linguistics and ethnomusicology. Some of these works were extracted from the library at the University of the West Indies, St Augustin in Trinidad. The rest was retrieved from local libraries and online in multiple academic databases. Finding academic work on calypso posed a challenge as much of the publications were not readily available; a common challenge in the Caribbean especially regarding literature pre-2000s. Via personal contacts via mail and local archives, I would acquire much of the work as well.

Most of the writers either were established in Caribbean universities or held positions in North America, and Europe. This in addition to broader anthropological works. All of which will be evident throughout the work.

## Writing style

As it relates to writing, this project is in some ways inspired by what is known as existential anthropology as I believe that as anthropologists, we owe it to the people whose stories we attempt to illuminate to do so in a manner that is best reflective of the way they make sense of the world (M. Jackson 2015). This means that we should not force fit narratives in the structures that we want or that we have been assigned. In a sense, stories have a way of narrating themselves. It is John Law who reminds us how messy that which we attempt to study can be, and how controlling and limited sometimes the social science research process is.

He says:

... parts of the world are caught in our ethnographies, our histories and statistics, but other parts are not, or if they are, they are distorted into clarity ... if much of the world is vague, diffuse or unspecific, slippery, emotional, ephemeral, elusive or indistinct, changes like a kaleidoscope, or doesn't have much of a pattern at all, then where does this leave social science? How might we catch some of the realities we are currently missing? (Law 2004, 2)

In an attempt to catch some of these 'slippery' and 'indistinct realities', which in a large part the field of cultural anthropology still allows us a space for, throughout this dissertation I use a literary strategy described as reflexive ethnography. According to Jay Ruby, to be reflexive is 'to insist that anthropologists systematically and rigorously reveal their methodology and themselves as the instrument of data generation' (Ruby 1980, 153). On the same topic Charlotte Davies writes, that 'reflexivity is a process of self-reference ...[deployed to show] the ways in which the

products of research are affected by the personnel and the process of doing research' (Davies 2008, 2). Though there are many interpretations of these concepts, the gist of the citations above suggests that the writer places the self within a social context by connecting the 'personal' and the 'cultural' (Reed-Danahay 1997, 9; Ellis and Bochner 2000, 739). Here ethnographers do not shy away from their own stories but instead incorporate their voice into the narrative including their biases in relation to their interactions. It is thus not a matter of 'self-indulgence' as Van de Port (2013, 2) would say but rather 'an attempt to make the inherently comparative nature of all anthropological work explicit and an object of scholarly reflection'.

Based on this approach you will notice that my writing style does not always follow a chronological format, but dialogically attempts, by means of thick descriptions interjected with autobiographies, dialogue, theory, flashbacks, argumentation, performance analyses, song text analyses, sensory experiences and a host of other approaches to try and paint a portrait of the people I attempt to study including myself.

As I alluded to before, you will notice that I try to keep as close to the original text as possible by presenting both the original text and the translation in the case of a local language; mostly Papiamentu and Spanish. Furthermore, I have consciously chosen to present the dialogue with the main research participants in their native language, which is mostly Creole English. Creole English is the most common language used in Aruban calypso and is also one of the local languages spoken primarily in the district of San Nicolas on Aruba (Stamper 2009). It is for the most part understandable but in some cases translations to standard English is provided when necessary.

Literary techniques also play a significant role in this reflexive writing style. On the importance of using literary strategies in cultural anthropology Van de Port says:

If we want to maintain that our wordings are capable of bringing our readers closer to the real of power, the real of violence, the real of the body, the real of the sacred, the real of sexuality or the real of beauty, we cannot do without literary strategies that are capable to evoke the unspeakable dimensions of such phenomena. (Van de Port 2011, 22)

Consider this research as an attempt to capture the unspeakable.

## Outline

In order to accomplish this, I have divided the rest of this dissertation project into three parts, (Part I, II and III) including a general introduction and concluding remarks. The first part is divided into chapters, 1, 2, 3 and 4, for reasons of length, yet having the same character.

Basically, part I sets the stage, as a manual for the narratives, song texts and other findings that appear in the rest of the dissertation.

In chapter 1, I give a short but profound exposition of the background setting of this study as well as the main scene of the yearly Calypso Festival. I focus on the perceived divide between two major districts on Aruba, namely San Nicolas (*pariba*) and Oranjestad (*pabou*). This is done in order to have a better understanding of the ways the calypsonian and Arubans for that matter have shaped their reality. In this chapter, I also elaborate more profoundly on my own position as a so called, endo-ethnographer, doing research in my ‘own’ country and in my ‘own’ district. It extends somewhat on what has been presented in the introduction with regard to my writing approach.

In chapter 2 I delve deeper into what I call the calypso world. Here I look at the overall calypso music genre from a global and Caribbean perspective in musicological terms as well as the actors involved in the calypso world, mainly the calypsonians. Thus, what calypso music actually sounds like, which instruments are used, its early history in the Caribbean and how the

music is perceived in the community. In chapter 3 I discuss calypso music in relation to Caribbean world making and Caribbean thought. That is looking at calypso music in literary terms and in the anthropology of the Caribbean. Here I look at the main literature of this musical form and in what ways it is related to wider forms of the Caribbean worldmaking. In chapter 4 I specifically look at the calypso space in Aruba and how it has developed historically. Because I am mapping the calypso world, I sketch, in concrete terms, a whole complex of calypso forms, calypso venues, calypso actors and calypso institutions on the island of Aruba. This mapping also includes a social geography and history of calypso music: what forms are claimed by whom and where on the island. I also discuss the different ways that calypso music is framed by different people and different communities such as for example people living in different districts on the island, namely San Nicolas (*pariba*) and Oranjestad (*pabou*), ethnic/racial groups, the carnival committee, the business community and individuals.

In chapters 5 and 6, I present a study of the calypsonians Mighty Talent and Black Diamond, two of the most famous calypsonians of our times, but who have adopted different approaches, to the calypso experience, mainly the Critical-Calypso despite both also being Roadmarch-Calypsonians. I focus on the moves they make in the calypso world; the position they take vis-à-vis different forms, including in some cases their Roadmarch-Calypsos. By analyzing the way that they engage with some of the Narratives of the One Happy Island, I will demonstrate what these two figures have in common, and how they differ; and what this tells us about the calypso world and the limitations of the Critical-Calypso with regard to the dynamics of symbolization.

Chapter 7 focuses on the Roadmarch-Calypso experience, mainly through the consideration of a number of case studies, including my own. I show how locals engage with

Roadmarch-Calypso and subsequently how they engage with some of the Narratives of One Happy Island. In this process, I use several Roadmarch-Calypso song texts of calypsonians like the Baron (from Aruba) and Mighty Rusty.

The closing chapter, unnumbered, provides an extensive conclusion of the work put forth. In this chapter, I return to the *jouvert-morning*; I revisit the different ways in which Critical-Calypso and Roadmarch-Calypso engage such notions as *plaisir* and *jouissance* and the link with some of the Narratives of the One Happy Island. Last but not least, I outline what I believe to be the most important contributions of this work.

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As an additional note, all (relevant) audio files of the songs used throughout this dissertation, can be found on the following website:

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRJzKzZyYy8Al\\_t4i0Ifkhk7Yg&disable\\_polymer=true](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRJzKzZyYy8Al_t4i0Ifkhk7Yg&disable_polymer=true)

The specific tracks and verses are mentioned in the footnotes.



# PART I

## CHAPTER 1

### Research setting and position in the field

In this chapter I present an extensive expose of the research field and my position as a researcher.

The aim is to provide a foundation for understanding the rest of the dissertation; especially the role of the calypsonian and my role as a local ethnographer.



**Illustration 2 Map of Aruba and its districts**

## Aruba

Aruba, is a relatively small Dutch Caribbean island in the South Caribbean off the northern coast of Venezuela. Its size is 193-square kilometers and its population approximately 120.000 according to the 2010 census (CBS 2010). The population is quite diverse as it is historically considered to be a broad mix of persons of Amerindian, European and African descent (Wever 2014; Alofs 2003).<sup>29</sup> Over 90 different nationalities reside on the island (CBS 2010). The island is described as having a small-scale dependent economy that carries a cultural, political and linguistic legacy of colonialism and patterns of globalization (Croes, 2007).

Together with its sister islands Curaçao and Bonaire, they make up what are known as the ABC islands. St Maarten, Saba and St Eustatius, also of the Dutch Caribbean make up the SSS islands; they are situated in the north-eastern Caribbean. Aruba has always remained with relatively close ties to another former Dutch colony, Surinam. Concerning their political status, Aruba alongside Curaçao and St Maarten have a semi-autonomous status within the Kingdom of the Netherlands as they are in large part self-determinant except for national defense and international affairs. Their status in some respects is comparable to the commonwealth of Puerto Rico and its political relationship with the United States of America (Lammert & Kruijt 2005).

Aruba is unique in the region as it is one of the few islands where plurilingualism is considered one of its main identity markers (Croes, 1995). The Iberian lexifier Creole Papiamentu, the most commonly spoken language on Aruba (also on Curaçao and Bonaire), is a Creole language with a Spanish and Portuguese lexicon and a typically West African (Benue-

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<sup>29</sup>Caquetios, from the Arawak language group from the northern coast of Latin America. (Venezuela and Colombia). DNA study by Dr Oswald Wever has shown that a considerable percentage of the Aruban population can trace back their heritage to these Amerindian populations.

Kwa) grammar (Martinus, 2004). Papiamentu and Dutch represent the official languages of Aruba. English and English lexifier Creole as well as Spanish are also spoken and together, they represent the so called ‘Big four’ (CBS, 2010; Rodríguez Lorenzo, 2015; Stamper, 2009). According to the 2010 census mother-tongue speakers of Papiamentu averaged at 69 percent, Spanish at 13 percent, English at 8.2 percent, which also includes English Creole speakers, and Dutch at 6.2 percent. The remaining residents speak other languages such as Haitian Creole, Mandarin, Hindi and even Tagalog among others (CBS, 2010). Dutch is the least spoken language of the ‘Big four’; it is mostly used in an academic and legislative capacity and has been a source of debate for many years (Dijkhof & Pereira, 2010).

Throughout this dissertation you will continuously notice how the language debate is intertwined with calypso and the way Arubans go about performing their identities.

### *Pariba versus Pabou*

In Aruba it is common practice for locals to map their island in halves. They would refer to these halves as *pariba di brug* [above the bridge] and *pabou di brug* [below the bridge]. Pariba is situated in the East and Pabou is situated in the West. The symbol of this divide and connection, depending on how one looks at it, is known as the *Brug di Balashi* [Balashi Bridge]. That is largely our frame of reference. The bridge is actually not large at all, but symbolically it carries a lot of significance. Aruba also has its tale of two cities, to use Charles Dickens’ book title.

The area of *pabou* includes the *barrios* of Santa Cruz, Piedra Plat, Paradera, Tanki Leendert, Noord and the capital Oranjestad amongst others and as well as the hotel area known to locals and tourists alike as the low-rise hotel and high rise hotel area or Palm Beach.

Oranjestad, named after the Dutch royal family of *Oranje Nassau*, is the area where the government, parliament, the courts, the census and so forth are located. It is the home of the island's administration and the home of the prime minister. Oranjestad is located on the South Central coast of Aruba and is also the place where the major commercial sector is found. Civil servants make the daily commute from various districts on the island in privately owned vehicles, such as the latest SUVs and small cars locally referred by some as 'sardine tins', or 'match box' as well as on local busses and smaller autobuses. At 12 pm you see civil servants walking to the nearby cafés for lunch with the latest smartphones in one hand, checking up on their Facebook posts and instant messages, while in the other hand holding a decaf mocha cappuccino from the nearby Starbucks.

*Pabou's* residential area lies on the outskirts of the capital. There are upper income neighborhoods as well as working class neighborhoods. In the latter, you will often see folks hanging out on street corners, kids sometimes in their underwear running through the streets as well as addicts on street corners. A bit further up the road, in other neighborhoods, you will find high fences, security cameras, families of the upper ten percent, and BMWs or Mercedes Benzes parked in the driveways alongside beautifully groomed gardens. Most of the island does their shopping in the main street of the capital. In the shopping area, you hear a mix of Papiamentu, Latin American Spanish, American English, Hindi, Mandarin and Haitian Kreyol amongst other languages. Here you see offices, businesses, wealthy as well as working class people, nightclubs, fancy American, French and Argentinean restaurants, schools and a university.



**Illustration 3 Tram Carrying cruise passengers in Oranjestad**

A bit further to the North near the crystal blue waters and pearly white sands of Palm Beach lies a strip of seemingly endless 5-star hotels which is also referred to as *pabou*. This area is a cardboard cutout of Miami Beach as it was modeled after this area's long stretches of beach adorned with palm trees, restaurants, nightclubs, gigantic mansions and perfectly paved roads. Everything is geared towards the American tourist market and the upper class Anti-Chavista tourists from neighboring Venezuela. The narrative in the tourist industry is that European tourists, mainly from the Netherlands, would rather vacation on the Dutch Caribbean sister island of Curaçao because they say it seems more 'authentic'. Some say that Aruba is fake and cultureless. A joking response by many Arubans would be, 'we don't give a damn about these types of criticisms, we are Americanized and we love it!'



**Illustration 4 Aruba Palm Beach**

*Pariba* consists of the barrios Pos Chiquito, Savaneta, Brazil, San Nicolas and others, but in everyday talk, Arubans usually mean San Nicolas. San Nicolas is also known in the community as Chocolate City, a term used by locals in reference to its darker complexioned inhabitants, in contrast to the lighter complexioned Arubans living in the other barrios of the island. From my experience one's interpretation of this concept usually lies in the expression, intonation and the intent. For example; fans of the concept Chocolate City say that chocolate is 'edible', 'sweet' and a little 'bitter'. They say chocolate has 'soul', it has 'rhythm' and chocolate has a bite to it. Fans of Chocolate City say that chocolate does not refer to darker complexions only, it's a whole concept on its own that encompasses a wide range of ideas, colors, attitudes, walks, talks, looks and an array of multiple expressions.

For more context, let's have a closer look at the San Nicolas (*pariba*) story.

## The San Nicolas Story

The city of San Nicolas plays a central role in this dissertation mainly because it is considered to be the home of calypso music in Aruba and some would even say the cultural foundation of the Aruban carnival.

A large percentage of the San Nicolas population are descendants of early 20<sup>th</sup> century migration to the island (Green 1974; Alofs & Merckies 2001). These immigrants were part of a larger demographic and cultural movement that influenced Aruba and the rest of the Dutch Caribbean in every sense of the word. For example, my grandparents, also part of this group, emigrated to Aruba in search of employment in the earlier half of the 20th century. They came from the Dutch/French binational Caribbean island of St Maarten/St Martin as well as from the British Caribbean island of Montserrat.<sup>30</sup> They were part of a larger group of mostly English speaking immigrants from the Eastern Caribbean who came to work in the oil refinery and its related industries on Aruba. They were locally referred to as *ingles* [The English]. This wave of migration, and the changes it brought about, has been well documented by scholars of the Dutch Caribbean such as Green (1974), Ridderstaat (2007), Allen (2011), Alofs & Merckies (2001) and Guadeloupe (2009).

In many ways, migration has been more the norm than the exception in the Caribbean (Faraclas 2012). During colonial times, if there was drought on one island, many men (sometimes entire families) would relocate to another island for work in the sugar cane fields. Upon arrival, they might encounter others who had already migrated from their island as part of

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<sup>30</sup> My grandfather Josephus worked in the Lago. My other grandfather, Joshua, worked in the Aruba water desalinization plant. My grandmother, Odetha, made and sold baked goods to nearby schools while my other grandmother Ann, worked as a domestic for well-to-do families in Oranjestad, the capital of Aruba.

a previous migratory wave. This helps explain why many Caribbean people have both closely and more distantly related family members on many other islands in the region. In my case, I am aware not only of branches of my family in the Anglophone Caribbean and Dutch Caribbean, but also in the Francophone (St. Martin) and Hispanophone Caribbean (Dominican Republic and Cuba).

When Black Gold (oil) was discovered in Lake Maracaibo in Venezuela, it was quickly arranged to have multinational refineries built just off the Venezuelan coast on the Dutch colonial island territories of Aruba and Curaçao. Venezuela, Curaçao, Aruba and Trinidad, became known in the region as the oil countries. The refinery in Aruba was American owned. The official name was Standard Oil Company (a subsidiary of Exxon) but locally known as Lago. This refinery was at one time one of the biggest in the world and was a key supplier of allied fuel during WWII. In 1942 a German U-boat even attacked the refinery causing significant damage (Ridderstaat 2007).

As with many other migration stories, my grandparents came to Aruba with the intention of staying temporarily, sending remittances to their homelands and expecting to eventually return to their native islands. The well-known narrative amongst many migrants is that they always had their suitcases, packed, stacked and ready to head back home. The moment of return for many, however, never came to fruition. In Paula Aymer's study entitled *Uprooted Women: Migrant Domestic Workers in the Caribbean*, there is an excerpt from a female migrant domestic worker that embodies this sentiment:

For all the years we lived in Aruba, I had five well-packed suitcases under bed, ready and waiting to take off at the drop of a hat. My husband was never lucky to find employment with the Lago [refinery] itself, always with a contractor, and anytime the job end, we back to worries. I never know when the knock would come in the night and we have to pick up and leave. I never take out Dutch Rights and it's only since he died, that I stopped worrying. (Aymer 1997, 63)



These newcomers resided mostly near the oil refinery and for the most part still speak English Creole known to some as San Nicolas English, Village English or more colloquially as ‘we English’, ‘bad English’ or ‘broken English’ (Stamper 2009; Rodriguez 2015; Richardson & Richardson 2012b). The latter two designations have come under scrutiny especially by San Nicolas academics because of their negative connotations. Most calypsos are sung in this Caribbean English variety.

At a given moment this migrant group constituted almost half of the inhabitants on the island of Aruba (Alofs & Merckies 2001). In many respects it was considered a thriving community. Several very prominent figures in Caribbean history were born in this area or either spent some of their younger years in San Nicolas, including Maurice Bishop, the Grenadian socialist revolutionary and leader of the New Jewel Movement, as well as former Grenadian Prime Minister Eric Gairy, who was a prominent trade unionist during this period (Allen 2011).<sup>31</sup> These immigrants also played an important role in the development of the tourism industry, which replaced oil refining as the main economy on the island from the 1980s onward and as such they were actively recruited as key sellers of the One Happy Island ideal to tourists. Many of them became front desk clerks, receptionists, casino dealers, taxi drivers, maids, gardeners, bell boys and the entertainment hosts in many of Aruba’s five-star hotels (Alofs & Merckies 2001).

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<sup>31</sup> See Grenada revolution and US invasion of Grenada during the cold war period under president Reagan for a broader international perspective.



**Illustration 5 Downtown San Nicolas 2011**

As you enter the city of San Nicolas, what undoubtedly catches the eye are the towering chimneys of the oil refinery spewing out a grayish-whitish smoke. The skyline resembled an island version of old industrial cities such as Birmingham, or Liverpool UK and Pittsburgh, USA. The high winds coming from the North-East blow gasses emitted from those chimneys to the southern coast. On days when the wind settles, the entire San Nicolas is filled with smog. On such days, schools in San Nicolas let their students out early and people try to avoid being outside. As a teacher in San Nicolas, many times I have had this experience and have been quite critical how often it occurs. I have even attempted to organize a walkout as a signal to the refinery and the government that we could no longer accept this situation. My proposition was met with skepticism. One student told me, *‘we need the refinery, even though it making we sick, my mother and father work there.... If it was not for that refinery, I would not have any food to eat’*.

The people of San Nicolas know how to put things in perspective I would say. Some environmental groups have complained about the pollution but most locals know that refinery is

the only thing keeping the city of San Nicolas alive. The very thing that is killing them has kept their economy moving so to speak. The refinery still provides jobs for the local boys and girls from the trade school as well as local engineers who have studied abroad.

The buildings in the downtown area are dilapidated and many storefronts are abandoned. Kentucky Fried Chicken is front and center in this urban setting, and a bit higher up there is also a booming red-light district. Locally known as *barbuletas*, the prostitutes are mostly Colombian, with all types of hair colors, ranging from *rubia* [blonde] to *negro* [black]. They wear ‘*pegaditos*’ [tight pants] and high heels, and parade in front of the bars saying ‘*papi*’ trying to make eye contact with by passers. Locals and excitement seeking tourists frequent these bars to drink, and indulge in the physical pleasures. Parents with their children frequent the same streets these bars are, for shopping. Despite some protest by local San Nicolas organizations, the *barbuletas*, refinery workers in coveralls, money transfer companies and teleshops, pawnshops known as *Compra y Benta*, vagrants, the scent of petrol, restaurants serving creole food, Christian groups evangelizing, mothers with children and bachata and cumbia music in the background all make up the everyday landscape of the downtown area of San Nicolas.



**Illustration 6 Oil Refinery in Aruba**

### San Nicolas in calypso song

Whether we grew up poor or middle class, the city of San Nicolas affected us all in one way or another. Interesting neighborhood personalities roam the streets, and the challenges of life in San Nicolas have formed the basis of many calypso songs. In school or during my basketball trainings in my teenage years, I would hear the guys talking about Dirilo, the alleged stalker, riding an orange bike and they would say if he calls you, you should run away as quickly as you can. They would also talk about Anzillia, who sat in front of the local *refresqueria* [corner store] in San Nicolas, and would yell at you, ‘*Fuck you, yuh mother scunt*’ if you looked at her just a little too long. She refused to be a spectacle.

To give a glimpse of how calypsonians felt about their district I will now reference some of the works of Aruban calypsonians. As a note, in the upcoming chapters I will delve into the calypso scene more profoundly and thus give calypso music as a whole its proper attention. Consider this a prelude.

Calypsonian Young Quick Silver, who grew up in the Village district of San Nicolas, uses the above mentioned characters and setting as a backdrop in many of his songs. In his song, ‘The Village Good, The Village Bad’ he describes life in The Village through the use of such local personalities in his lyrical play. He gives a nuanced description of his old neighborhood that has suffered from a bad reputation. His criticism seems to be geared towards the portrayal of his neighborhood in the dominant discourses on the island. Young Quick Silver describes his neighborhood as a diverse place, with working class professionals, kids selling lotto tickets known in Papiamentu as *catochi*, teachers, thieves, hustlers, priests and more. He sang:

*Man a vex, a tired, a want to know,<sup>32</sup>  
 tell me why they bad talking di Village so,  
 a fed up, a vex, so I am asking you,  
 tell me what di village or di village people do,  
 some say di houses them breaking down,  
 some calling it Aruba shanty town,  
 so I would just like to prove to them come what may,  
 di village ain't as bad as they say  
 (chorus)*

*we have Stanley, Loly, Waniko and Stropi, right in di village,  
 where you could find little children selling catochi, right in di village,  
 we had barbers, shoemakers, first class pipe fitters, right in di village,  
 so when they running off they mouth tell them a say they mad,  
 di village couldn't be all that bad*

These narratives one could say do not fit into the One Happy Island brand as projected by the Aruba Tourism Authority. Hotel workers from San Nicolas, I have spoken to have told me that some hotel supervisors and tour companies discourage visitors from going to San Nicolas by saying it is riddled with crime, poverty and prostitution and there is little to do there, without any factual evidence.

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<sup>32</sup> Track # 4 verse 1 on YouTube channel

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjZkZyYy8Al\\_t4i0Ifkhk7Yg](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjZkZyYy8Al_t4i0Ifkhk7Yg)

Calypsonian Mighty Talent in his 1990 song titled ‘Calypso Classic’ speaks to this issue. He also talks about Chocolate City togetherness or *we-ness* by showing how resilient and blessed the people of San Nicolas are, because they have always remained as one by adopting a sort of a One Love mentality.

### **Calypso Classic 1990<sup>33</sup>**

*Why people still treat us unfair  
Telling tourist not to come up here  
They say avoid us, please be cautious  
San Nicolas is so dangerous  
They say San Nicolas is drug city  
Up there, we aint got a thing to see  
They say all we got for attraction  
Is the women them who working prostitution  
No matter how they try to keep us down  
San Nicolas always stay as one,  
That is why God bless all a we  
He give us back we refinery*

I always get the impression that many people from San Nicolas live in a nostalgic bubble that constituted part of our common narrative. The narrative had a particular tone: ‘we longed to get back to the glory days of San Nicolas, when it was a Caribbean metropole, where thousands of people from the entire region came and helped build Aruba into what it is today’. We would also say ‘San Nicolas was the center of commerce, we had a high American standard of living, we had our own hospital; San Nicolas was home to different social clubs, movie theaters, bookstores, baseball fields and lodges where the enlightened met’. Also, ‘San Nicolas was a mecca of Caribbean culture. It was home to most religious institutions, a force in island politics and a center of knowledge’. In many ways, the sad truth of the matter is that these things were a

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<sup>33</sup> Track # 5 verse 1 on YouTube channel

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjZkZyYy8Al\\_t4iOIfkhk7Yg](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjZkZyYy8Al_t4iOIfkhk7Yg)

thing of the past. We often felt as if we were the ‘old, rotten and forgotten city’ on the island.

The only thing we could hold on to still was ‘carnival’ and ‘calypso’. It was ‘ours’ and we would fight for it until the end.

### Position in the field: *San Nicolas Boy for Life*

*Semper ma wak e struggle cu nos den village a pasa den dje. Semper nan tawata tin Village pinta como un schrikbuurt... e tawata un small multicultural town. ...Pero nos a demonstra cuanto talento a sali for di den village..... Pesey semper mi no tin berguensa di bisa cu mi ta un ‘Village Boy for life’. Paso bo semper tin cu corda di unda bo a sali. Bo origen.*

[I always saw the struggle that we experienced in the village. They always saw The Village as a shanty town...It was a small multicultural town... But we demonstrated how much talent came out of the Village.... That’s why I never am ashamed to say that I am a ‘Village boy for life’. Because you always have to remember where you came from.]

In the interview excerpt above, taken out of the documentary, *Mighty Lords Kings and Queens, Calypso and the Politics of Recognition*, the calypsonian Mighty Tattoo, spoke of his childhood experience of growing up in a small San Nicolas neighborhood called The Village. He talked about the diverse cultural background of the neighborhood and the togetherness of its people. He also spoke about how people saw The Village as a shanty town, a so called [*schrikbuurt*], that was disregarded and stigmatized by many. Despite becoming very successful in the music business, being the only person on Aruba to be crowned king of three different major music festivals during carnival; Critical-Calypso, Roadmarch-Calypso and Tumba, he said that he did not feel ashamed of his origins. He concluded by saying ‘no matter what they say, I am a village boy for life’.

I use Mighty Tattoo's example, of being a 'Village boy for life' as an introduction to this paragraph because just as him, I too consider myself a 'San Nicolas boy for life'. I also use this statement as an analogy to better describe my position in this study as a cultural anthropologist on my own island and in my own city.

Let me elaborate. As a 'San Nicolas boy' I can't say that I grew up the same way as many of the calypsonians. I can't say that I grew up poor, that we struggled to get by or that I did not know where my next meal would come from. I grew up in the 80's in Lago Heights, a suburb of San Nicolas together with my older brother and sister in a middle-class neighborhood. Lago Heights is where families of middle managers of the refinery formerly lived. They were not part of the 'upper tenth', but they were not that badly off either. Even though the first and biggest refinery closed its doors and ceased operations in 1986, the neighborhood retained its socio-economic profile even after the departure of many of the Lago middle management operatives. We faced regular challenges on occasion, but overall there was no lack of the basics. We always had food on our table, clothes on our back and shoes on our feet. Nikes to be exact!

My mother was a pharmacist and worked for many years in the hospital and my father worked his way up to be the chief engineer of Aruba's largest hotel at that time. My parents would eventually separate when I was eight, but financially we were okay. We went on yearly vacations and were even members of the Esso Club, a social club in the greater San Nicolas area known as The Colony where we played tennis on occasion. Prior to 1986, The Colony was a segregated area open only to the mostly white management of the refinery.

My mother was a first-generation Aruban, daughter of *ingles* immigrants. She was the first in her immediate family to pursue higher education in the Netherlands. This was in the early 60's. I remember stories my mom told to me about when she was an Aruban student in The



Hague, and she was pointed out by a little schoolgirl saying ‘*mama kijk een zwartje*’ [Mom look a black person]. Even though my mom was not big on racial politics, she instilled in us an ethic of self-help, which meant working hard, and not making any excuses despite your skin color. In fact, we were told that we had to work twice as hard as immigrants and as black people in this world.

As you can imagine, I grew up in a household that valued education very much, a tradition in my family that can be traced all the way back by my grandfather, who like many other newly arrived oil boom immigrants, saw education as the only means of upward mobility. Speaking to my grandfather as a child, my future career options were always between being lawyer or doctor. At home encyclopedias filled the book shelves next to my mom’s medical encyclopedias (no google then).

Growing up, religion was also very important to us. Even though I was Roman Catholic by baptism, because of my mother, every Sunday we attended services and Sunday school at the San Nicolas Methodist church. My mom was very independent, and relatively progressive. We were dedicated Christians but not religious conservatives I would say. We went to parties and went to carnival and calypso festivals with the family. Some of my aunts were *carnavalistas*, participating yearly in the carnival parades in San Nicolas and Oranjestad. I also had uncles who played steelpan music. Alcohol was permitted, but everything had its limits, and your conduct had to be that of the educated class. There was very little shouting in public, arguments were to be resolved in a civil manner despite the occasional outburst, and as they say in Aruba ‘*not everyone have to know your business*’. Just as my mother, older brother and sister had done, I too had to go to the Netherlands to further my education at the tertiary level.

## My people?...observations on endo-ethnography

The question that remains is how do I link myself to and place myself within the calypso scene. Perhaps I can be best described as a conscious enjoyer, and observer of calypso music, but not quite a participant in the calypso world as such. Even as I studied the material, my interest was mostly from an academic perspective, inspired by scholars such as Cornel West (2000) and Michael Eric Dyson (2004) in their work on jazz, hip hop and religion in the U.S., while also being ordained ministers.

Earlier on in my research process, I was not aware how this upbringing influenced the way I carried myself, how others viewed me and how I carried out my research. For the past twelve years I have been an active participant on the Caribbean Studies academic circuit, writing and presenting locally and internationally, researching all that is related to calypso music in Aruba, the Caribbean and Central American region. Within this timeframe I held community talks, movie nights and other community gatherings on the topic of the calypsonian, calypso as oral history, calypso and multilingualism and more.

Prior to, and throughout my research journey, I always positioned myself vis-à-vis my European colleagues as a Caribbean person, a person of the region, local expert, a black person and especially an insider. Midway, I had another realization while doing fieldwork in San Nicolas. I experienced what it felt like 'being a stranger in one's own land'. I always thought that doing research on my own island or what Rob van Ginkel (1998) and others have called endo-ethnography or native ethnography, would give me a certain advantage in terms of confronting a number of the challenges that some of my Dutch colleagues have faced on their fieldtrips to the Caribbean. I noticed quite early on, in Trinidad and Aruba, that it was indeed much easier for me to comprehend the English Creole language that calypsonians use, as well as the nuances of the

language. I could also put the interpretations of the lyrics in a broader context. I would hang out with calypsonians at the bar or in the clubhouse and speak in English Creole, English, Spanish, Papiamentu or Dutch. They would often tell me ‘*so you doing research on calypso?..... ahhhhh you one a we*’, to certain degree acknowledging my clan membership. However, while on the surface it may have seemed that I had all of the right connections, as I progressed, I realized that this was not always the case. One of the pitfalls that I had to avoid was the assumption that because I am a ‘native’ I really ‘understand’ the culture. Experience has shown me that this definitely is not the case. Jaqueline Sarsby, for example, is quite skeptical of native researchers as ‘true insiders’ when doing research in their home territories.

There is little likelihood of true insider research ever becoming common. The ethnographer will always be somewhere on the continuum between empathy and repulsion, home and strangeness, and seeing and not seeing. (Sarsby 1984, 132)

As an example, I experienced a rude awakening during a heated discussion with some of the neighborhood boys from San Nicolas on the topic of school safety, gangs and criminality on Aruba, to which I also contributed my two cents. Benjamin, the *trompetista* [trumpet player] told me that I wouldn’t know anything about gangs and criminality because I grew up in an ‘middle class neighborhood’ and received a ‘good education’ so I wouldn’t really know what ‘they’ were going through. There it was, front and center. Basically, no matter how native I thought I was, there was always someone there to remind me otherwise. I was black, and from San Nicolas, but, classified as belonging to the educated class, those that lived up the hill and those who could afford to go to university and go on vacation.

This prompted me to reflect on the whole notion of endo-ethnography. The fact is, I concluded, there is actually no such thing as an endo-ethnographer. Using anthropological jargon, we all are outsiders, because of our own interpretations within the dynamics of

symbolization in which we are merely interpreting our own reflections. My colleague, Dimitri Halley, an Aruban born Jungian psychoanalyst, who studies dreams and symbols, reminded me of the ‘observer’s paradox’ and that in the final analysis, there is no such thing as an objective observation and that whatever we interpret is in some way related to the way we see ourselves.<sup>34</sup>

Nevertheless, I still wanted to know more about calypso culture and all the fascinating dynamics involved in its manifestations in pluri-lingual Aruba. This is why I have heeded the call by Fahim, (1977, 86) for anthropologists to be ‘professional strangers’ with a keen sense of ‘involvement’ and ‘distance’. It is this tension between ‘empathy’ and ‘detachment’ that has given me the space to write from a perspective that places my admiration for calypso culture center stage, while allowing me to employ an analysis that can contribute to our understanding of Caribbean forms of world making.

Throughout my research journey, my position and my personal background would be continuously called into question especially by calypsonian Black Diamond, but others as well, who couldn’t quite place me, not knowing if I was a friend or foe, and questioned my capacity to speak on their behalves, and not truly being of the calypso community. As you will see, in some cases my position was also used to valorize the position of the calypsonian and their art form in the minds of decision makers.

So, throughout this journey, consider me as also displaying and employing some shape shifting characteristics. In other words, using my local identities as a boarder transgressor operating in the calypso space but not, actually, being of that world. Thus, consider me a bridge

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<sup>34</sup> Throughout the research period (2008-2015) I had different sessions with him concerning different matters (especially symbolic) of my research.

in an attempt to catch much that is often lost in translation between the calypso space and the academic world.

## CHAPTER 2

### The Calypso World, Calypso Music and the Calypsonian

#### The Calypso World

*It's a living vibration rooted deep within my Caribbean belly,  
Lyrics to make a politician cringe or turn a woman's body into jelly  
It is a sweet soca music, calypso  
You could never refuse it, calypso  
It make you shake like a shango, calypso  
And why the hell yuh shaking you don't know, calypso<sup>35</sup>*

It was lyrics like these by Trinidadian calypsonian David Rudder in his 1987 song titled Calypso Music, where in his words poignantly describes the calypso music genre, that played a role in encouraging me to continue my journey throughout the Caribbean to find out what calypso music was all about, how it related to Caribbean thought, where it was performed, how it was performed, who the writers were, who the actors were and what the listeners and non-listeners thought of the genre.

Rudder is here comparing calypso music to the female gender in that it is able to transform the body into something fluid and edible like 'jelly' and 'mango' as well as having the ability to transform ordinary men and women into deities such as the *orishas* of the Afro-Caribbean religions in Trinidad and Tobago. It's not rocket science really, but anything that could make a politician cringe, make someone shake beyond control and turn a woman's body into jelly, was definitely worth a more careful look.

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<sup>35</sup> Track # 1 verse 2 on YouTube channel

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjZkZyYy8Al\\_t4iOlfkhk7Yg](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjZkZyYy8Al_t4iOlfkhk7Yg)

During my calypso journey it became more evident than ever to me that the calypso music genre has a special place in the hearts of many people in the Anglophone Caribbean and is considered one of the region's crowning achievements alongside steelpan, reggae, athletics and cricket (Manuel, Bilby and Largey 1995; Rohlehr 1994). Locals are very adamant in stating that, '*is we pride and joy*' as it is a prominent staple in the national discourse of the region.

It seemed like that there was a history and legacy that was to be defended. It was a world of sorts, a 'calypso world' you could say. By the calypso world, a notion similar to Becker's (1982) articulation of the 'art world', I refer to as a world where the co-creators of calypso space, essentially those who make it work, whether singers, writers, musicians, DJ's, promoters, listeners, critics, academics or event organizers cohabited. This world of course was not monolithic but one thing I have experienced during my calypso journey, one had to maneuver carefully in this space.

During my research journey I was warned by local calypso aficionados not to play '*big man*', as they call it, or in fancier academic jargon, 'expert', because the overall calypso art-form is bigger than me, or anyone else for that matter and a '*lil boy*' [little boy] like myself, who was still considered an outsider, couldn't come and tell them about 'their' thing without properly conducting sound research and speaking to what I call the calypso elders first.<sup>36</sup>

The calypso elders were somewhat like the unofficial guardians or gatekeepers of the art form. In my calypso journey I have come to know these elders as usually older black men of an English-speaking Caribbean background in Aruba. These men did not have the monopoly on

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<sup>36</sup> This respect for origins, ancestors and seniority is associated with innumerable cultural traditions in the Afro-Atlantic, such as Candomblé and Capoeira in Brazil, Tambu in Curaçao and Bamboula in St Croix US Virgin Islands etc (Toyin Falola 2013, 182).

calypso council though, at least not in Aruba, as there were also calypso elders from different ethnic backgrounds and gender classifications.

The calypso elders mostly acquired their status by apprentice-ship under the auspices of another elder and or by their accomplishments within the calypso world. Most of them were retired or elder calypsonians themselves, older calypso composers, older calypso DJ's with a long and respected trajectory and even academics who, because of their long trajectory and expertise within the genre, are in a position to give council on matters related to the calypso music studies. Even at academic conferences, I was challenged about my knowledge of calypso music by older professors in this area of study, whom I also consider to be part of the calypso fraternity. For professional reasons I will not mention their names however sometimes the look on their faces seemed to say 'you better be careful with what you're saying or else ...'. I quickly got the impression that I needed their blessing to continue with this type of work, and if not, my academic career would be '*dead on arrival*'.

## Calypso Music

Quickly returning to David Rudder's lyrics in the opening paragraph, it would seem that what he identifies as the ability of calypso 'to make a politician cringe' within diverse social, cultural and geographical spaces, has been one of the principal reasons why it has remained relevant for over one hundred years as one of the oldest and most popular musical forms to come out of the Anglophone Caribbean (with strong historical ties to Francophone culture) (Hill, D. 1993; Rohlehr 1990). It is also this cultural and musical fluidity and flexibility, that was able to catapult this Caribbean art form onto the American scene in the 'golden era' of calypso and further on to



rival Rock and Roll during the ‘calypso craze’ of the 1950s (Funk & Hill. D 2007). The Andrew Sisters’ interpretation of Lord Invader’s, ‘Rum and Coca Cola’, Harry Belafonte’s, ‘Banana Boat Song’ (*day oh*), Arrow’s ‘Hot Hot Hot’, and Baha Men’s interpretation of Anselm Douglas’, ‘Who let the Dogs Out’, are internationally some of the most commonly known calypso songs, but calypso music has had a much longer and deeper history throughout the entire Anglophone Caribbean (Hill, D. 1993; Warner 1985). On the international scene, calypso music is identified as what soca artist Bunji Garlin calls ‘happy music’ but within the Caribbean, veiled behind the curtain of its creole languages, it is especially known for its critique of the dominant classes and the articulation of a plethora of emotions for that matter through rhyming of words on a syncopated beat (Liverpool 2001).

Sylvester, Alfonso & Baldwin-McDowell provide a description of calypso music that emphasises its main characteristics and its origins on the island of Trinidad.

...[Calypso]... can be described as an indigenous folk music whose roots stem from the plantation era when complaints, disunity and disloyalty was frowned upon. As such slaves developed a system of communication amongst themselves where they sang of their woes and their causes in hidden verses or double entendre, which sought to satirise the actions of their slave masters as well as create the great divide in communication between the slaves and the plantation owners. (Sylvester, Alfonso & Baldwin-McDowell 2013, 201)

These and other characteristics of the calypsonian have historically not gone unnoticed among Caribbean scholars in the fields of literature, music, language and cultural anthropology, who have tried to theorize calypso music in ways that academics could digest. The writings, many of which will be cited in this dissertation, of Rohlehr (1990), Hill, E. (1967), Hill, D. (1993), Liverpool (2001), Manning (1990), Warner (1985), Cowley (1996), Dudley (2003) and Regis (1999), to just name a few, have provided us with tremendous insight into the calypso music genre and have carved out a niche for what, in the Caribbean academy, has been often seen as

folk art, principally for the ‘bad boys’ on the street. These writings in many ways constitute what I consider to be a canon of calypso studies. Most of the more recent studies on calypso by for example graduate students extract in large part from the above mentioned works.

Calypso music is difficult to characterize according to a fixed set of elements when referring to how a band is assembled. Much of calypso music depends on the region where the calypso is performed, for example either in the Eastern Caribbean in places such as Trinidad, Grenada, Dominica, Barbados, the South Caribbean in places such as Aruba and Curacao or Central America in places like Panama, Costa Rica. It also depends on the musical resources available. The music is also influenced by the culture thus they may be many varieties.

In fact, calypso music can be performed by a solo artist accompanied by a cuatro, ukulele, banjo or guitar. It can be also accompanied by a larger *conjunto* consisting of different musicians. Generally, many calypso musicians would say that three to four instruments are essential in modern day calypso music, namely a percussion instrument (drum), a bass, a steel instrument such as a campana (cowbell) or car rim, and an acoustic string instrument, either a cuarta (cuatro) or guitar. Other musical instruments can be added to enrich the sound such as the piano, the maracas, the steelpan, horn instruments such as saxophones, trumpets, trombones, flutes, conch shells, glass bottles, animal horns and other percussion instruments such as the bongos and the congas. It all depends on style and emphasis.

Regarding the musical patterns of calypso, the literature indicates that calypso pieces, specifically Critical-Calypso are commonly based on a two-beat structure that focusses on a constant bass line on a slow beat. The song structure consists of multiple verses interchanging with refrains. Traditionally the verses consist of the eight lines and a four-line refrain. There is however no exact rule on this as calypsonians are known to construct their songs in creative

ways as they please. The refrain may vary in lyrics depending on the composition of the calypsonian (Dudley 1996; Allen, 2014).

This is a sample of a calypso medley that has an eight-line verse popular on the Caribbean coast of Panama and Costa Rica. This medley is a version of *Mama Jugando*, originally sung by Puerto Rican bolero singer composer Daniel Santos.

#### Verse

- 1) I went to a fiesta
- 2) Me and my vecina (neighbor)
- 3) Was in the interior
- 4) On the third of November
- 5) Sweet music was playing
- 6) The people began to sing
- 7) The song that I like, that I always want to hear
- 8) The song was calypso

#### Chorus

1X

- 1) *Jugando mamá, jugando*
- 2) *con la hija de la vecina.*
- 3) *Pero muchacho, ¿qué hacías tú*
- 4) *Tanto tiempo en la cocina?*

1X

- 1) *Jugando mamá, jugando*
- 2) *al gallo y a la gallina.*
- 3) *Pero muchacho, ¿qué hacías tú*
- 4) *con la hija de la vecina?*

Despite all the musical structures, in the end, the calypsonian is still the most important carrier of the music. The call and response nature of the calypso like for example in Belafonte's *Banana Song*, '*Day ohh* (singer)...*Day ohh* (audience) *mi say de, mi say de, mi say dayeeohh....day light*

*come and me want go home*', is how the calypsonian interacts with the audience. In that sense, the music can be considered complimentary to the calypsonian, who's main task is to bring a message as the traditional *griot*, traveling messenger and story teller.

For reference outside of the English-speaking Caribbean, calypso music has many musical family resemblances in the Caribbean region such as the Biggie Poko and Kaseko in Surinam and the Mento in Jamaica (Van Stripiaan 1993). Elements such as social commentary, improvisation, the percussive aspect of the music, the call and response nature of the music and the centrality of the singer whose main responsibility is to carry the message are also found in these musical genres as well.

An instrument that is often associated with calypso music is the steel pan instrument.<sup>37</sup> The steelpan, also known as the steel drum outside of the Caribbean, was developed in Trinidad during the period of the second world war by the working-class groups (Stuempfle 1995). It's a percussive instrument made out of a cutout 55-gallon oil barrel tuned to produce different notes. Because of the oil industry in Trinidad many of the used oil drums were discarded and left as rubbish. The locals creatively took what was seen as useless material and invented the only officially recognized new instrument of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The steelpan is the national instrument of the island nation of Trinidad and Tobago.

Even though calypso music was invented prior to the steelpan and can be played without the steelpan, the steel orchestra became one of the main carriers of calypso music during carnivals and other festivals. The chant 'steel band and calypso' became a common expression;

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<sup>37</sup> This short expose on steelpan music is just for context in relation to calypso music for readers outside of the Caribbean. This dissertation does not focus on steel pan music as its main subject. For more in-depth information on steelpan music see Stephen Stuempfle (1995), Shanon Dudley (2008), Angela Smith (2012) Charissa Granger (2018).

especially in Trinidad and Tobago. Just as calypso music, through migration, steelpan music has spread throughout the Caribbean and the world and has in many ways become a symbolic representation of the Caribbean.

### The Calypso Sobriquet

As it relates to the calypsonian, the calypso artist traditionally assumes a royal name to fit their personalities. In the calypso world you could either be a King, Queen, Lady, Baron, Mighty, Lord, Doctor or any *sobriquet*, a playful nickname, that stood out as being powerful or as somehow exemplifying your personality. Usually these sobriquets would be given to performers during their younger years by a fellow calypsonian or friends in the neighborhood (Best 2012, 44). Theorists have written about comparable appropriation of titles normally assigned to members of ruling classes by the working class in other parts of the world.<sup>38</sup> Gluckman (1954) refers to such phenomena as examples of upside-down hierarchies, while Babcock speaks about how symbolic reversals can be seen as emerging from a playful space where one can witness a ‘freeing of focused energies within a restrictive or artificial environment in which social threat can paradoxically be expressed without threatening’ or ‘a space in time to take chances with new roles and ideas’ (Babcock 1978, 24-25).

While one might consider the use of self-agrandizing or super-sizing sobriquets as an example of pure boasting and bragadocious bombast, the reality, like so much else in calypso, is

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<sup>38</sup> Henry Louis Gates’ (1988) concept of ‘signifyin’ gives a good understanding of a similar phenomenon in the Afro American oral tradition.

much more complex and subtler, and at the same time, much simpler and pragmatic. Barbadian scholar Curwin Best helps us to understand the phenomenon when he states that:

The sobriquet is an important feature of the calypso art form. Calypsonians do not casually assume a performance name. Traditionally, the sobriquet is taken up to signify something about the performer and his or her philosophy, manner, outlook, and demeanor. Many calypso stalwarts have therefore assumed the name of legendary historical figures, by way of signaling their own greatness and potency. Calypso names like Lord Beginner, Atilla the Hun, and Roaring Lion are therefore signifiers of royalty and might. Within the tradition this is a very serious process, where the artist undertakes to uphold the principles and manner associated with the name taken up. Indeed, the taking on of a name is akin to wearing a mask, where the performers lose their everyday personalities and identities when they take to the stage. Because the calypso is traditionally heavily involved in critiquing officialdom, mask wearing can also become a buffer to shield an outspoken artist in case there is some form of legal official reaction. (Best 2012, 44)

The sobriquet of the calypsonian one could argue took control over the actor, the role player, who became transformed by the title into a character who had the authority to speak on issues of significance, without having to suffer any of the consequences that would normally follow.

Trinidadian calypsonian and calypso historian, Liverpool, in the documentary *Calypso Dreams* produced by Dunn and Horne et al. (2004) speaks to this matter when he observes:

The sobriquet in calypso is like an English judge. The English judge, wears a wig, and he wears a wig to tell you, I condemn you to death. It is not me who is condemning you to death but it's the wig that has condemned you. And so the sobriquet in calypso came from laughing angry men. They laughed but they were angry inside and they were telling you that when I come on stage, it is not me, whatever my name is John Thomas...it is what I represent.

To problematize this discussion even further, it was not always the case that these sobriquets were boastful exaggerations, some were indeed more than justified by the exceptional nature of the calypsonian's genius. Mighty Talent was known as a *wunderkind*, who could play the piano at an early age and entertain the crowd effortlessly much like Stevie Wonder. Lord Boxoe used to be a locally known boxer in his early days. The Mighty Tattoo was given that name because of his small stature yet powerful voice. Mighty Whitey because of his white complexion amidst

mostly black calypsonians and Lord Cachete because of his long chin [*cachete* is chin in Papiamentu].

### The Calypsonian as a *Bad John*, *Sagaboy* and Anansi

The reputation of the calypsonian was not only about admiration though; they were also seen in many cases as controversial personalities. I was told by Juancho, a former steelpan player in the 70s that people were often skeptical of calypsonians and steelpan players, because they were known as *bad johns* and *sagaboys*. A *bad john* was the equivalent of an American ‘bad boy’ or Jamaican ‘rude boy’ which was similar to a sort of a local trouble maker, or bully, who would voice their opinion, good or bad, regardless of the circumstances (Allsopp & Allsopp 2003). In a documentary on calypso music in Panama, *El Calipso en Panama* (Provoust, still under production), by Damien Provoust, calypsonian and ethnomusicologist Leslie George talks about this *bad-john* reputation:

*...y por supuesto los calypsonians tenían una serie de connotaciones, no trabajaban, eran bajo, eeh fumaban su marihuana, y su inglés era, el inglés el patois el inglés, eeh corrupto.*

[And of course the calypsonians carried several connotations, they didn't work, they were considered vagabonds, they smoked marijuana. And they used a kind of English, that was Patois English, corrupted].

*Bad Johns* had a reputation of being high school drop outs, who mostly worked blue collar jobs and who spent their weekends and money in the local *rumshops* [local street side bars]. A *sagaboy* was the Caribbean version of a modern-day playboy, or ‘*sweet man*’. Etymologically, the term *sagaboy* is said to be an English creole version of the American word ‘swagger’(--

*swagah—saga*) (Neptune 2007)<sup>39</sup>. A *sagaboy* would usually have a bouncing walk, maybe with a slight lean either to the right or the left and exude a high level of confidence. The *sagaboy* would be very stylish wearing the latest fashion and lots of jewelry and be very popular with the ladies. In a conversation with the now deceased Young Quick Silver, one of the all-time great calypsonians and calypso elders on Aruba, he told me<sup>40</sup>

*Back in those days calypsonians had a bad reputation. Back in those days girls would be warned not to date calypsonians because of their sagaboy reputation. Calypsonians were not to be trusted and also to be known to make songs of their love affairs. If things did not turn out right, there was a chance that they would become the subject of the next song.*

While the calypsonian as a *sagaboy* and *bad john* could be considered the flip side of the glamorous and admired master performer, there was a *flip* side to this *flip* side, because *sagaboys* and *bad johns* were also considered to be intelligent and street smart; organic intellectuals of sorts. Thus, the calypsonian embodied more than just double voicing and double consciousness. Instead of a binaristic duality, the calypsonian was multiplex and pluri-voiced, dancing along a series of precipices of contradictions within contradictions. In a sense they had the ability to speak profoundly and superficially, using the exact same words in the exact same moment about all types of issues of concern locally and internationally. More interestingly, it was all mixed with a high dose of curse words and a satiric yet self-critical, reflexive disregard for what society saw as moral. The many calypsonians I interacted with did not seem to have a problem singing about moral issues while ‘oiled’ [under the influence] of scotch whiskey and living sort of a free uncommitted life style. In an interview one calypsonian said to me, ‘*I bring a message, the truth, as I see it, but that don’t mean that I perfect*’.

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<sup>39</sup> Mooiboy would be an equivalent in (Dutch/Surinamese)

<sup>40</sup> Young Quick Silver, interviewed by the author, March 2011, Aruba.



In many ways, the calypsonian embodied the afro-transatlantic folk tale character known as Anansi. Anansi or Compa Nanzi as it is called in the Dutch Caribbean, is described as a spider-human hybrid avatar whom symbolizes the trickster archetype of multiple identity in creolized societies (Souza 2003). This folk tale character is considered a master trickster and a shape-shifter who utilizes his wisdom to counter, subvert and appropriate dominant discourses (Burton 1997). Barbara Babcock Abrahams', *A Tolerated Margin of Mess: The Trickster and His Tales Reconsidered*, gives a few examples of the characteristics of the trickster. She said that they typically:

- tend to inhabit crossroads, open public places, doorways, and thresholds. [They hardly ever have their own homes and] are usually situated between the social cosmos and the other world or chaos;
- have an ability to disperse and to disguise themselves
- are generally *amoral* and *asocial* - aggressive, vindictive, vain, defiant of authority, etc.;
- exhibit a human/animal dualism and may appear as a human with animal characteristics or vice versa... (Abrahams 1975, 160)

She goes on to say that, 'The defining feature of a trickster, however, is that everything about his being contains dualism. He is never completely evil, nor is he ever completely good. His very nature is an 'expression of ambiguity and paradox, of a confusion of all customary categories' (160).

So, as you can see, the calypsonian's nature is seemed very similar to that of Anansi. As Anansi, the calypsonian uses a '*klein maar dapper*' [small but brave] approach, in for example critiquing discourses such as the Narratives of the One Happy Island. To do this the calypsonian makes use of a border transgressing repertoire of poetics of multiple consciousness and multiple voicing to identify with both the poor and working classes as well as with the elite. Also, through humor and gossip amongst other methods.

In the end however, all of this complex richness and depth was often embodied in a troubled person speaking on troubling issues, like a prophet with deal-breaking vices. Financial difficulties, drug addiction and alcoholism were also very real in the calypso world as I understood it. In a way of speaking they stole from the rich and poor alike. Some calypsonians told me that every time they earned a little money, '*the belastingdienst* [tax department] '*up in we ass*'. Another calypsonian told me he had to chase the tax office employee, with a machete from in front of his home. I also heard from many calypsonians, of colleagues, who fell victim to drug addiction and of musicians who died as a result of street violence.<sup>41</sup>

So as you can imagine, calypsonians did not have best reputation in the world. These types of reactions I picked up in many of my conversations with persons in the community, '*No hode cu musico, nan ta core caya y nan ta muheriego*' [Don't mess around [dating] musicians, they 'run the street' and are womanizers] or '*these musicians got children all over the place, yuh can't trust them, they have women fo so [like crazy]*'.

Regardless, of the way many of us may thought about the calypso world, and despite our moral judgments of the calypsonian, in the end we still faithfully went to the calypso festivals every single year, bought their CD's, joined their groups and most importantly '*broke away*' to their Roadmarch-Calypso tunes. In the end, there was somehow still some sort of a pull factor to the calypsonian; in the end there was still some sort of a 'lure of the bad boy'.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> The social behavior of the musician has also been discussed in Alan P Merriam's *Anthropology of Music* (1964). Similar narratives (South Pacific, West Africa, North America etc) of low social status, yet admired and deemed necessary in societies rituals. Also examples around the world of musicians getting a pass for their 'moral transgressions'. Also being male dominated. (124-144)

<sup>42</sup> The allure of the bad john/rude boy has been addressed by many Caribbean scholars. See Carolyn cooper (1995), Rhoda Reddock (2004).

## Chapter 3

### Caribbean thought and Calypso Music

This chapter briefly looks at the different ways, studies engaging with calypso music have been shaped and how these studies are related to broader forms of Caribbean thought. I take Caribbean thought to be a set of important ideas to do with the Caribbean region translated into scholarly works across various academic disciplines. It is therefore imperative that I provide a brief look at some of the major themes to come out Caribbean scholarship and thereafter delve into some important works and ideas on calypso music. I finalize this overview by highlighting why certain theoretical perspectives such as creolization may provide interesting viewpoints when doing this type of research into calypso.

#### Caribbean thought in perspective

Let me start by saying that any form of writing that does the entire body of Caribbean thought justice would be an overly ambitious project to say the least. I say this not as a pessimist but as an anthropologist realizing that there are many angles from which to look at and many complexities which have to be considered. For example, the insular nature of Caribbean studies and the language complexities of the region alone provide many challenges as indicated previously by many scholars of the region.

Also, it must be taken into consideration that cultural anthropology as an area of study in the Caribbean region has long been neglected. Longstanding American anthropologist Sydney

Mintz in his works as early as the 80s (1985) has specifically brought to our attention how ‘under researched’ this region is because of its perceived ‘normalness’. In other words, the Caribbean has been perceived by anthropologists as having characteristics of a ‘modern’ society, not ‘primitive’ enough and thus not interesting enough to explore (Trouillot 1992).

What I can say though that there have been noteworthy intellectual productions from thinkers and writers, from the Caribbean region, yet much of the academic works for the most part tend to be geared towards empirical and literary study rather than theoretical and philosophical engagement (Gordon et al 2016). This means that any study on the Caribbean would have to draw from not just from anthropological works but would have to broaden their scope to include other areas of study and other languages.

If we look at the themes adopted by many scholars that study the Caribbean in general, we see for the most part, that their writings have been based on, or in some capacity related to colonialism and the subsequent results thereof. The literature is often, though not exclusively, presented along chronological thematized lines often starting with: the pre-columbian period, colonialism, genocide of the Amerindian populations, transatlantic slavery and plantation labor, emancipation, indentureship, independence and post colonialism, tourism and globalization. Herein, the theme of identity and belonging is often transversally present throughout the work with topics such as race, class, gender, language, politics, religion, economic mobility, migration and culture at the fore. Especially academics that focus on the Caribbean in for example European universities in places like the Netherlands and England have based their work largely on issues of identity and belonging as a result of migration processes within the Caribbean diaspora communities. Scholars such as Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Francio Guadeloupe, Valika

Smeulders, Philomena Essed and Gloria Wekker are some of the recognized contributors in this area.<sup>43</sup>

Specifically, to do with writing emanating from the Caribbean basin, that is from Caribbean universities, we see some major themes that share much linkages with the writings on calypso music. I have identified these major themes as, ‘plantation society perspectives’, ‘plural society perspectives’ and ‘creole society perspectives’ (R.T Smith 2002, 86). These perspectives are of course not one dimensional as they are not only defined by a specific set of characteristics. Even though they may seem dated, these perspectives as developed in the Caribbean throughout its history, still help us to understand the flows of thought emanating from the Caribbean basin, both in the past and the present. I will briefly summarize the main perspectives and thereafter look more critically how they are related to scholarship on calypso music.

Plantation society perspectives are often characterized as Caribbean societies historically organized along separate groups dominated by a local elite, usually white, operating within the European dominated colonial system by means of the plantation economy. Here resources were (are) sent to European metropolises for further ‘development’ like for example sugar (George Beckford 1972, Lloyd Best and Kari Levitt 1975). According to Beckford:

The plantation is a total economic institution. It binds everyone in its embrace to the one task of executing the will of the owner or owners. And because it is omnipotent and omnipresent in the lives of those living within its confines, it is also a total institution. (Beckford 1972, 55)

We see that this perspective also characterizes the society by mostly a singular perspective, where a single culture, language and identity are imposed by the metropolises. This is especially evident in government institutions, education system and the courts. This approach sees Western

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<sup>43</sup> I refer here to their overall body of work to specifically give an example in this context (identity and belonging). Additionally, should mention that this list is by no means exhaustive.

European and later North American powers as ‘colonial masters’, who use hegemonic discourses of ethnocentricity, economic domination through neoliberal capitalism and patriarchy to establish and maintain their control over the land, labor, as well as minds and bodies of Caribbean people. Caribbean academics such as Hilary Beckles (2013) and Verene Shepherd (2002) would argue that in the age of globalization, plantations have been replaced by neoliberal multinational corporations in the Caribbean. In essence not changing anything. More recent works on ‘coloniality’ and ‘decoloniality’ by Caribbean and Latin American scholars such as Quiano (2000), Mignolo (2001), L. Gordon (2015), Maldonado-Torres (2017) draw a lot from the plantation perspective as it relates to the mental remnants of colonialism and the importance of emancipating one’s mind from mental enslavement so to speak.

If we take a closer look at plural society perspectives, we see Caribbean society characterized from a perspective where separate groups cohabit within the same space but where there is little to no cultural exchange among them (Hoetink 1967; Van Lier 1971; M.G. Smith 1974). M.G Smith defines a plural society ‘as a unit of disparate parts which owes its existence to external factors, and lacks a common social will’ (Smith 1974, vii). He argues that in a plural society, there are several co-existing ethnic groups each of which has a nearly complete set of social institutions, including family structures, economies, languages and religions with all the while being subject to the same political system, and dominated by the colonial or neo-colonial power. Multicultural theory as applied in many cases to Western European societies holds many resemblances to plural society perspectives (Vertovec 2010). Multiculturalism is often seen as the coming together of people of diverse ethnic backgrounds, cohabitating a particular space as a result of waves of migration. For example, as in the case of post-world war II immigration to western Europe. The critique has often been that in these

spaces there are interactions on a surface level like in supermarkets, in schools and at work but not on a level where there is through engagement and where true mixing actually occurs like for example intermarriage (Guadeloupe & de Rooij 2007).

Lastly, Creole society perspectives, is one that looks at Caribbean societies from a panmictic perspective, where there is a fusion or a mix between ethnic groups as a relational and continuous process (Kamau Brathwaite 1971, Antonio Benitez-Rojo 1996; Edouard Glissant 1999). Concepts like *mosaic*, *bricolage*, hybridization, superdiversity, *metissage*, *mestizaje* are some of the notions that have been used to describe similar type of processes. From this perspective one could be a blend between European, Indian, Amerindian and African simultaneously; one could be pluri-lingual and one can have several mother tongues simultaneously so to speak. Glissant as one of the foremost creole theorists shows how plurilingual to be a vehicle in what he calls an ‘explosion of culture’. He says,

If we posit *metissage* as, generally speaking, the meeting and synthesis of two differences, creolization seems to be a limitless *metissage*, its elements diffracted and its consequences unforeseeable...Its most obvious symbol is in the Creole language, whose genius consists in always being open...Creolization carries along then into the adventure of multilingualism and into the incredible explosion of cultures. (Glissant 1999, 35)

I return to these perspectives more critically in the last paragraph of this chapter.

### Calypso Music and Caribbean thought

My readings of the many works on calypso music show that calypso studies tend to produce a certain type of argumentation that mainly resembles plantation perspectives on the Caribbean. Herein two dominant threads seem to be at the forefront in the calypso works produced over the past two decades. The first one being related to what Herskovits calls the ‘African retentionist’

position (Herskovits 1941) and the other is related to what Manning (1990) and others like Regis (1999) have referred to as the ‘true democratic voice’.

In short, the African retentionist position, stems from the well-known Herskovits-Frazier mid-20<sup>th</sup> century debate where American anthropologist Melville J. Herskovits and sociologist E. Franklin Frazier advanced their differing positions on the retention of African lifeways beyond the middle passage. Herskovits argued that much of black America has retained in some way or form, an African *modus vivendi*, which was evident in what he called Africanisms which are mainly to be found in religion, language and music.

On the opposing side of the debate, Frazier, argues that because of colonialism and slavery ‘the Negro was stripped of his social heritage’, retaining little that was truly of African origin (Frazier 1931, 386), especially in areas such as social organization, religion and language. Frazier summarizes these developments as ‘The Break with the African Background’ (Frazier 1974, 10).

Herskovits’ African retentionist theorizations highlights the agency of African slaves brought to labor on the sugar plantations all throughout the Caribbean. The narrative in this line of thought suggests that African slaves forbidden to express their discontents openly, and severed from family and home, began to sing songs covertly mocking their masters as an alternative form of resistance (Liverpool 2001; Rohlehr 1990). In this narrative there is also a clear link with West Africa. For example, early calypso researcher and historian, Errol Hill, suggests that ‘traditional West African song genres are the predecessors of the calypso’ (E. Hill 1967, 57). Expounding on this premise, we see scholar and calypsonian Hollis Liverpool (2001, 187), also known as The Mighty Chalkdust, referring to ‘West African *griot* storytelling’ and ‘praise



singing’ as the basis of all calypso music.<sup>44</sup> This line of thought further suggests that African and African descended slaves creatively opened up spaces, first in French Creole and later in English Creole, in which any form of emotion could be expressed by means of these creolized languages and through *double entendre*, which could convey one message to their fellow slaves or other community members, all the while delivering a different message to the master or those in positions of power.

Let me illustrate to the reader how *double entendre* [double meaning] might work by a modern-day example. Aruban calypsonian *Pa10pret* in the early 2000’s sang a calypso about a female minister of infrastructure, whose main public works project for that year entailed repairing the pot holes on Aruba’s highways. In the refrain of the song, he sang that she needed to ‘fix her hole’ because it was ‘too big’, because she was responsible for that area and was not doing a good job. ‘Hole’ in official parlance would refer to the pot holes on the roads, but in folk interpretation it sarcastically has a sexual connotation.

Furthermore, Liverpool suggests that calypso music has several characteristics, which he identified as 1) percussive rhythmic beats, 2) the call-and-response pattern; whereby the calypsonian incorporates the listener into the performance, thus transforming the listener into a performer, extemporaneous [extempo] singing understood as essentially creating lyrics and rhymes unrehearsed on the spot, and 3) *picong* which is a stinging form of (often satirical) humor (Liverpool 2001, 185). A modern-day example of extempo would be *freestyling* in hip hop music which is now very popular around the globe.

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<sup>44</sup> Hollis Liverpool is a scholar and university professor as well as a calypsonian, hence the name Mighty Chalkdust. It is not uncommon in small Caribbean societies for persons to assume different roles in different settings; the lines are not clearly demarcated thus there is much border transgression. In many cases persons are required to be general practitioners on all fronts; including in arts, entertainment and academia.

Writing on the socially critical nature of calypso and its connection with Africa, Gordon

Rohlehr suggests that,

...the roots of the political calypso in Trinidad probably lie in the African custom of permitting criticism of one's leaders at specific times, in particular contexts, and through the media of song and story. The leaders of society recognized the value of such satirical songs in which the ordinary person was given the privilege of unburdening his mind while the impact of his protest was neutralized by the controlled context in which criticism was possible. (Rohlehr 1990, 2)

Rohlehr continues by stating that calypso music is,

...related to all Black diaspora musics, regardless of language, and shares with them traditional African functions of affirmation, celebration, protest, satire, praise, blame and conflict of all varieties. (Rohlehr 1990, 5)

What we see that in many of these writings, anything that challenges the neat path between West Africa and Trinidad, is often met with criticism and regarded as irrelevant. Take for example the work of Rafael de Leon, also known as calypsonian The Roaring Lion, who in his publication, *Calypso From France to Trinidad 800 Years of History* contends that calypso music has its origin primarily in France (De Leon 1986).<sup>45</sup> Within this text, he amplifies the colonial narrative linking calypso music with the French troubadours and French colonial influence. This work has widely been dismissed, and in many cases 'laughed off', because of its alleged unscholarly quality, but perhaps even more often because it does not fall in line with the African retentionist position. Also, for some scholars such as Liverpool, the mentioning of non-African influences as key factors in the development of calypso music is non-plausible. Some writers even argue, that reluctantly the Indo-Trinidadian influence in calypso music in Trinidad is recognized, especially

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<sup>45</sup> Roaring Lion is also a calypsonian and author.

in reference to the beginning of the soca music era, and the role of East Indian men/women, gastronomy and culture in calypso songs (Constance 1991; Ramnarine 2001).<sup>46</sup>

The second thread alludes to calypso music being the ‘true democratic voice’ or the ‘voice of the people’. In other words, the calypsonian is said to represent the ‘will of the people’, and as such, the calypsonian is the impetus for the articulation of the dissatisfaction of the audience with their politicians and elected officials and others in positions of power. You can say that this voice very much mirrors postcolonial theorizations by such scholars as Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Frantz Fanon, in which what Spivak (2010) calls *the subaltern*, is allowed to speak. These include *petit* narratives articulated ‘below’ the surface by those who have historically been physically and mentally oppressed at the hands of the imperial West. In these narratives, the subaltern are finally able to give ‘their’ side of the story, ‘their’ experience and to expose Eurocentric history making as ‘his’-story and not our story.

In the case of the Afro-Caribbean, similar critical theoretical constructs surfaced long before the emergence of post-colonialism as a recognized intellectual trend. Scholars and activists such as Fanon (1961) speaking of the *Wretched of the Earth* in which he provides a psychiatric and psychologic analysis of what he considered to be the dehumanizing effects of colonization on the human being and the nation rephrase the sentence. He also discusses the broader social, cultural, and political implications necessary for creating a social movement for the decolonization of a person and of a people. Scholar turned politician Eric Williams (1944) tried to re-frame Caribbean people’s understanding of *capitalism and slavery* through a critique on the idea that moral and humanitarian motives were the main reasonings behind the British

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<sup>46</sup> Indentured laborers mostly from India, known as East Indians came to Trinidad to work after the abolition of slavery in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This ethnic group (Indo-Trinidadian) constitutes almost half of the Trinidadian population (Klass and Arensberg 2011).

abolition of slavery. He argued that they were mainly economic motives.<sup>47</sup> University professor and activist Walter Rodney (1972) in his seminal work, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* argued that Africa was deliberately exploited and underdeveloped by European colonial regimes through a combination of power, politics and economic exploitation. He argued that the catastrophic results are evident in the 20th century.

In this particular Caribbean version of post-colonial thought and expression, as exemplified above, the calypsonian is often heralded as the 'true voice of the nation' by the academic. These positions celebrate the calypsonian as a single, privileged, expert and absolute voice that speaks for all factions in society (Harewood 2005). In this mode of thought, orality, be it through storytelling or oral history, is given an important role next to academic writings. The oral is closer to the heart, closer to emotion than the printed letter. It recognizes, and is recognized by the man on the street, and has the potential to transform the artist into an organic intellectual, as shown in the following impressionistic but emblematic examples by leading calypso scholars.

Keith Warner in his publication *Kaiso! The Trinidad Calypso: a study of Calypso as Oral Literature* states that 'The calypsonian understood and voiced the true feeling of the man in the street' (Warner 1985, 63). Frank. E Manning speaks of the calypsonian as the 'voice of the oppressed' where 'calypso is both an expression of participatory democracy and a means of preserving it' (Manning 1990, 426). Hollis Liverpool (1986) attributes to calypsonians the power of both putting a political party into power and kicking it out of office. Louis Regis (1999) at his turn has looked at the actual impact of calypsonians in relation to electoral politics their election-year rhetoric aside. Recent studies by Everard Phillips (2009) have deployed legal theory as a

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<sup>47</sup> Eric Williams became Trinidad and Tobago's first prime minister.

basis for conceptualizing the role of calypso music in processes of mediation. Phillips attempts to elevate the status of calypso to that of an officially recognized means of conflict resolution in society using legal theory which traditionally has been seen as high culture in Caribbean societies. In other words, utilizing jurisprudence to theorize calypso music elevates its status as a genre to something more than just folk music, or popular music for the working classes.

These examples show that recognition by Caribbean scholars of the calypsonian as an organic intellectual were presenting a narrative that challenged the notion of Caribbean working class artistic expressions as meaningless and pure entertainment. Many of these Caribbean scholars were some of the first working class locals to complete tertiary level education, either at home or internationally. They grew up under colonial rule, and were personally and intellectually shaped during a period of nationalism, pan-Caribbeanism and pan-Africanism perhaps explaining their emancipatory worldview (Nair 2000, 239).

In view of the general academic discourse dealing with calypso music in the region, we see a clear affiliation in the writings with the plantation worldview and sporadically, identifications with pluralistic and creolized ways of looking at the world. Contrary though, to calypso compositions, as calypso singers themselves, throughout the years, have rather spoken to a wide range of topics such as the African origins of the music but also nation building topics emphasizing the coming together of people of different ethnic backgrounds in our societies. In the coming chapters these types of calypso's and others will be highlighted in detail.

I have found it rather very interesting how Caribbean novelists have characterized calypsonians and their expressions. The Caribbean literary approach can be considered somewhat more inclusive or like what Paul Gilroy refers to as a 'the rhizomorphic, fractal structure of the transcultural, international formation' (1993, 4). That is, what I interpret as

looking at the Afro Atlantic space (Africa, the America's and Europe) and its people as trans-territorial beings not bound specifically by territory, but by a history of contestation and fusion. It is in this space, despite its ugliness, where creativity has flourished and continues to flourish.

In this same vein, the approach to calypso music by Caribbean novelists emphasizes what I interpret as 'transcultural nostalgic', in other words looking at what calypso music 'means' and 'feels' to the people, and in that process also describing their reactions, and experiences to and with the music.

Caribbean writers like V.S. Naipaul (1959) early in his career, Michael Anthony (1989), Samuel Selvon (1985), and Earl Lovelace (1998) all used calypsonians as characters in their novels. They depicted calypso music and people as symbolic representations of transnational connections among the Caribbean diasporas throughout the world. These novelists have created a creolized space for anything related to what is interpreted as Caribbean. For example, in Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1985), the main character Moses, a Caribbean man, who has been living many years in London, is a creator/recreator of a Pan Caribbean space, where other West Indian immigrants from the different islands and from different backgrounds, could come and listen to 'the latest calypsos' and reminisce and furthermore could keep up to date with what was going on 'back home'. Morgan's literary analysis of Indo-Trinidadian writers Selvon and V.S. Naipaul, and their usage of calypso music in their works, is very telling. She says,

In Naipaul's and Selvon's fictions of the 1950s and 1960s, the calypso is reflective of shared experiences of poverty, social adversity, individual and communal disempowerment, and of adversarial gender relations. As Indo-Trinidadian writers who adopted calypso for their thematic and stylistic emphases, they resisted the propensity to use this nation song to signify ethnic dissociation. Instead the calypso as literary emblem was associated with belonging, rootedness, homecoming, and the formation of a common front in relation to external global events such as war, American army occupation and its paradoxical impact on the social conditions of Trinidadian life. (Morgan 2005, 10)

A passage on calypso music in Earl Lovelace's novel *The Dragon Can't Dance* is perhaps even more telling as it suggests that 'the dancing of calypso music', is an all-encompassing human, spiritual and remedial expression in response to life's joys and sorrows regardless of one's background. He says,

There is dancing in the calypso. Dance! If the words mourn the death of a neighbor, the music insists that you dance; if it tells the troubles of a brother, the music says dance. Dance to the hurt! Dance! If you catching hell, dance, and the government don't care, dance! ... Dance! Dance! Dance! It is in the dancing that you ward off evil. Dancing is a chant that cuts off the power from the devil. (Lovelace 1998, 5-6)

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### The Creole perspective towards studying Calypso Music

I present this last paragraph as a supplement to the above observation, specifically to shed light on what I call the 'creole perspective towards studying calypso music'. Perhaps this perspective offers more alternatives to study the calypso art-form compared to the way most calypso studies have traditionally been analyzed; that is primarily via the plantation perspective as we have seen in the prior paragraphs. Consider this paragraph also an addition to my overall methodological approach of this dissertation as presented in the introduction.

I interpret 'creole perspective towards studying calypso music' as a view of calypso music from an open-ended creolized perspective. Meaning from a space that explores limitless possibilities of calypso music. I believe that even though creole perspectives recognize the historical origins and developments of calypso music, it does not limit itself to the past only, but also looks at the present. It looks at the overall development of calypso music and the way it engages people and vice versa. It is important to bring to the fore that the calypso genre has not

stayed within the confines of Trinidad and Tobago but has traveled by means of migration to the Dominican Republic, Panama, Costa Rica, Venezuela, Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao - virtually all of the Caribbean. This development has resulted in an interesting mix of language, culture, race, gender and other elements such as dance and body; all elements that have not yet been explored significantly from my observation e.g., (Ramirez 2005; Razak 1997; Sandoval 2010; Richardson 2015). Thus, any approach we adopt to study calypso music, must be inclusive and open-ended.

Creolization, as has been described above, amongst others by the likes of Nettleford 1973, Hannerz (1987), Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant & Jean Bernabé (1989), Gilroy (1993), Hall (1993), Benitez-Rojo (1996), Glissant (1999), Stripiaan (2000), Price (2001), and Guadeloupe (2016) in ways that seeks to defy totalizing, singular, mono-causal, essentialist, binary, pro or contra narratives and instead tries to embrace connections, synergies, and fusions out of multiplicities. In a way, these interpretations of creolization conveniently reminds us that when we rigidly try to define forms of consciousness as binary constructs or try to describe the world as ‘Amerindian’, ‘Black’, ‘East-Indian’, ‘Asian’, ‘White’, ‘Koolie’, ‘Nikker’, ‘Macamba’, ‘English’, ‘Papiamentu’, ‘Dutch’, ‘Spanish’, ‘physical’ or ‘spiritual’ there is always someone or something, somewhere to remind us otherwise because creolization is always relational, becoming, in process and transcends encapsulation. On creolization in the Caribbean Bernabé says:

We declare that Creoleness is the cement of our culture and that it ought to rule the foundations of our Caribbeanness. Creoleness is the inter-actional or transactional aggregate of Caribbean, European, African, Asian, and Levantine cultural elements united on the same soil by the yoke of history. (Bernabé et al. 1993 [1989]:87)

Guadeloupe and Wolthuis (1996) use the metaphor of the Caribbean Callaloo soup to illustrate what this Caribbean creolization might be like:

To know the Caribbean is to have tasted or at least heard of Callaloo soup. A rich broth produced by mixing various spices, vegetables, roots, meats and fishes, Callaloo soup is



both a Caribbean and outernational dish. Different wherever and whoever prepares it, Callaloo can be understood as an invitation to appreciate the interconnected worlds that our collective experience of western colonialism and resistance to that brute social fact has brought about; an embrace of compositeness

However, I must warn you not to see the creole space as a panacea, and if I have given you that impression, I apologize. Creolization perspectives have been put into perspective in many ways by the likes of Stephen Palmie (2006) and Dominique Chancé (2011) on several fronts. Some of the main critiques have been geared towards:

- 1) Scholars whom have gone about employing the notion of creolization without critically assessing its historical origins and the multiple interpretations that are associated with this notion all across the Caribbean and Latin America. Some have argued that the term is political and elitist in nature. For example, in certain parts of the Hispanophone and Francophone territories ‘creole’ was used to claim sovereignty by the local ‘mixed’ population in opposition to the colonial administrators on the European mainland. Also used to identify the local *criollo* group, as being part of the ‘white’ local elite class, in order to distinguish themselves from those of African and Amerindian descent.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, regarding the multiple interpretations of the term creole throughout the Caribbean and Latin America, we see the term creole used in places like Surinam, and the Guyana’s to identify maroons living in remote inland territories. Similarly, in Brazil, where the term *Crioulo* refers to a person of African descent. In places like Haiti, New Orleans, Trinidad and Tobago, creoles, are referred to as mixed and lighter complexioned individuals of part European descent. There are often considered as part of upper classes.

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<sup>48</sup> Haiti, New Orleans, Trinidad and Tobago are some examples hereof.

- 2) The notion being appropriated by non-Caribbean scholars applying creolization as a concept universally to spaces outside of the Caribbean, like for example in South East Asia, the South Pacific, Africa and Western Europe. Critics have argued that these territories have not experienced the same historical processes as the Caribbean and thus cannot claim creolization as their own; it is something explicitly Caribbean.
- 3) It's supposed pretentious character and its sugar coating of the many challenges facing Caribbean societies such as racism, colorism, neo-colonialism and dependency, and the economic marginalization of especially those of African descendant. In the same context, creolization perspectives have been also accused of emphasizing white European and Asian ancestry and deemphasizing or downright ignoring African ancestry in the Caribbean. Critics would claim this to be a manifestation of a sense of inferiority in which it is better to associate oneself with all types of ethnic backgrounds except that of Africa.

A good example of the latter point is illustrated in a calypso entitled *They aint see Africa at all*, written and performed by Trinidadian calypsonian, The Migly Chalkdust.<sup>49</sup> He exemplifies the sentiments of this type of critique very poignantly. He sings;

*I see black women, running from their race  
 They own black children they can't face  
 They don't know their roots has a glorious bloom  
 Blessed be the fruit of their womb  
 They does be acting as though they shame of their history  
 They does be proud of other people's own  
 They does be glad to disclose their baby's ancestry  
 Putting their child up on a false throne, not their own  
 For hear them boast, to their friends and neighbor  
 My baby's nose from his Spanish grandfather*

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<sup>49</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4lu5XoG1QWU>

*My grandmother married a Chinee, named Lou  
 That is why the eye so pretty, and he have such thick eyebrow  
 The dimple come from the husband side, whose great grandfather is Irish  
 And look and them eyes, so pretty and wide, cause me mother mixed with British  
 And watch at me, I am Carib and Portuguese so my child hair curly  
**But the baby black down to di eyeball, they ain't see Africa at all, at all, at all, at all**  
**But the baby black like a voodoo doll, they ain't see Africa at all***

While acknowledging the above described concerns and limitations surrounding the notions of creole and creolization, I still make the case that its open-ended character offers more possibilities for when looking at calypso music. An interesting perspective on creolization is that of Caribbean novelist, Earl Lovelace. I think his perspective really exemplifies the argument I am making. In his writings he makes a comparison between the so called 'ethnic space' and the so called 'creole space'. To Lovelace, the ethnic space is inhabited by persons with purist notions of race and ethnicity. Those who inhabit this space feel that they should function as a racial or ethnic block to advance certain agendas, because they have been historically oppressed. In the creole space rather, there are many more possibilities for exploration. About the creole space he says;

We all have a lot to lose if that space becomes corrupted, bacchanalized, rendered impotent. The idea of having ethnic spaces as reference points has many merits in what is still very much a Eurocentric world, but the vision of ethnic spaces as a retreat from the bacchanal of the Creole world is a temptation we must resist. The space for adventure, for newness, for growth is the Creole space. It is this space that we have to get right. It is here we have to challenge definitions and pose questions and utilize what we have inherited to shape a real space of our own... (Lovelace 2005, 8)

I have found Susan Harewood. as being one of the few scholars that has articulated the limitations of traditional calypso research very well as she has been trying to study calypso music from a more 'open ended-creole' perspective. She uses the concept of *play*, and *masquerade* as a methodology towards calypso music. She says,

In fact, I contend that using masquerade as an analytical tool permits us to engage with calypso and carnival *practice* and frees us from the rigid nationalized and racialized boundaries erected, in traditional calypso research around the concept of the people. I argue that masquerade in calypso performance reveals the emancipatory possibilities to be found in the porous nature of community boundaries. (Harewood 2005, 190)<sup>50</sup>

To finalize this chapter, I use this quote which summarizes the ‘creole perspective towards studying calypso music’, and thus also my methodological approach very well. Using Gilroy’s theorization of the Black Atlantic as a premise, Harewood calls on us to adopt a more inclusive approach to calypso when she says<sup>51</sup>,

... rather than focusing on the roots of calypso, it is much more helpful to try and think in terms of Paul Gilroy’s (1993) homonym routes. Nearly everyone in the Caribbean comes from somewhere else. In fact, most were actually routed to the Caribbean with little or no choice in the matter. Obviously, this most specifically refers to the Africans who were enslaved. However, one must also include the indentured servants—European, East Indian, Indonesian, and others. All of these routes constantly crisscross within calypso by expressing the rhizomorphic, fractural (Gilroy, 1993) identity of the Caribbean and producing complex notions of community. In doing this, we might make ourselves more open to the range of voices colliding and crisscrossing through Caribbean cultural forms. (Harewood 2005, 192)

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<sup>50</sup> Traditional calypso research can be understood here as plantation perspectives of looking at calypso music.

<sup>51</sup> Gilroy’s reference to the rhizomorphic, fractural within the Black Atlantic has been elaborated on earlier in this paragraph; thus, to say that this particular notion of Gilroy has been looked at critically.

## CHAPTER 4

### *Calipso di Aruba* [Calypso of Aruba]

This chapter is the last segment of Part I of the dissertation. It specifically aims to provide a historical context as a backdrop for Part II where I ethnographically detail the lives of several Aruban calypsonians. Here, I give a short historical overview of calypso music in Aruba and how it has developed throughout the years, despite its challenges, becoming one of the most popular musical genres on the island in less than a century; especially during carnival. Note that this chapter uses some newspapers headlines on calypso in Aruba as a guide throughout the text in order to provide a more reflective sentiment of the local community towards the art-form.

#### Calypso arrives in Aruba

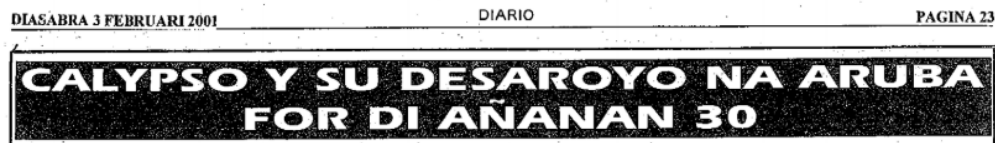


Illustration 7 Diario newspaper headline Feb 2001 Calypso and its development on Aruba since the (19)30s

As described in detail in the earlier chapters, calypso music was introduced to Aruba by Afro Caribbean *ingles* oil boom immigrants in the earlier half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century from places like Trinidad, St Vincent, Grenada and other Anglophone Caribbean islands. Throughout the last century calypso music increased in popularity under the mostly non-black local Papiamentu population. The ascendance of calypso music was however not exempt of its challenges. Some of these issues will be discussed further in the text in both this chapter and the consequent chapters.

The Calypso Festival in Aruba was first held in the Lago Sport Park venue in San Nicolas, in 1964 as part of the larger yearly Aruban carnival celebration. Calypso music as a genre however was well a part of Aruban society prior to its entrance in an organized form though maybe not as widespread. As the *Diario* newspaper article headline above suggests, ‘calypso music was part of Aruban society as early as the 1930’s’.<sup>52</sup> It especially became known amongst the larger population at around the time of the second world war where popular calypsos were often rendered by steel bands during parties and festivities around the island. Steelpan music, which also made its entrance in Aruba during the same period by the same group of oil migrants, also became very popular on the island.

An indication of calypso’s early popularity on Aruba, can be found in the reporting of the bilingual, English and Papiamentu Lago refinery newspaper, *Esso News*. In their publications they dedicated special segments to calypso music, reporting on the performances, participants and winners of the yearly calypso festival. In the below news article, we can observe the 1972, *Esso news* headline which states, ‘Lord Boxoe wins Calypso King for third consecutive year’. In the illustration you can see the then president of the *Stichting Arubaanse Carnaval (SAC)*, the central carnival organizing committee, presenting Lord Boxoe with the first prize trophy. You can also see him being crowned and being decked with the king’s mantle. Lord Boxoe won the title that year with the interesting double entendre calypso title called ‘Pussy don’t kill me’, a song about a woman’s pussycat whom he says was rebellious and wanted to attack him.

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<sup>52</sup> *Diario* is a local Papiamentu language newspaper on Aruba. The article is written by local columnist, author historian Hubert “Jubi” Naar.

### Lord Boxoe Wins Calypso King Title for Third Consecutive Year



In left picture, Carnival Foundation President Milo Croes crowns Lord Boxoe winner of the Calypsonian contest in the Sport Park on February 9. In center are the three winners (l to r): Lord Boxoe, Tito Flores (2nd winner) and Lord Viking (3rd winner). At right, Lord Boxoe receives trophy from SAC President Milo Croes.

Den portret robez, President di SAC Milo Croes ta corona Lord Boxoe como ganador di Concurso di Calypso den Sport Park Feb. 9. Den centro ta e tres ganadornan (r pa dj): Lord Boxoe, Tito Flores (2do ganador) y Lord Viking (3er ganador). Na drechi, Lord Boxoe ta recibí trofeo for di President di SAC Milo Croes.

**Illustration 8 Esso News headline 'Lord Boxoe wins the crown' 1972**

After almost 80 years on Aruba, calypso music, steelpan music and carnival have also become main marketing content used by the Aruban tourism industry in the selling of Aruba as a One Happy Island under the sun. Tourism commercials aired in the U.S., Latin America and Europe about Aruba, often featuring calypso and steelpan music in the background, dancing girls with Brazilian-like carnival costumes, with messages like, 'Come to Aruba and be happy' or '*La isla feliz*'. Calypso in this role is depicted as the main soundtrack, a sort of a rhythmic glue, in some of the Narratives of the One Happy Island, where pale-skinned, winter-fatigued North Americans and Europeans can come to defrost and get a tan on Aruba's white sunny beaches. Below is one such an illustration used on a tourism website catering to Latin American tourist.

■ SESENTA AÑOS DE CARNAVAL

## Aruba: carnavales al ritmo del calypso

29 de Enero 2014 | Categoría: [Internacional](#)



Illustration 9 Spanish language online tourism website news article promoting Aruban carnival by means of calypso (Jan 29, 2014)<sup>53</sup>

### A closer look at the Calypso Festival on Aruba

The Calypso Festival has become one of the biggest local music events on Aruba. The compositions presented at the festival are primarily the main sources of musical entertainment during the national carnival celebrations on the island. The attendance of calypso festivals

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<sup>53</sup> [http://www.turisticaonline.com/12/noticias/9399/aruba\\_carnavales\\_al\\_ritmo\\_del\\_calypso.html](http://www.turisticaonline.com/12/noticias/9399/aruba_carnavales_al_ritmo_del_calypso.html)



regularly surpasses most other music events on the island such as for example jazz, soul and Latin music festivals hosted every year by the Aruban government and the tourism authority as part of their larger festival tourism campaigns. Even with for example the likes of Wyclef Jean, Robin Thicke, Marc Anthony in their lineups.

To get an idea of how the big the impact of this event is, I will share some observations. On average the festival hosts between 75 to 100 participants that compete; which is more than most other music contests on the island. There are usually three prefinal nights out of which they select the 35 best participants. The qualifiers go on to the final show on the big stage in San Nicolas. The selection is done by a panel of judges with a certain expertise in the field of calypso. However, there are always debates surrounding the neutrality and the qualifications of the selected judges. As it is a small island, calypso judges are often accused of favoritism, because of either family, friends and business affiliations. I will detail a few examples in the coming chapters.

Most radio stations on the island broadcast the Calypso Festival live with on air commentators sharing their opinions on the compositions and performances. In some ways it is similar to music talent shows internationally known such as Eurovision, The Voice, Idols and the like. Tele Aruba, the national television station is the official broadcaster of this event and Setar, the biggest telecommunication company on the island, is the official sponsor. If fans are not able to be present, they tune in at home or abroad to follow the contest via internet radio.

Going back to my own experiences as a kid in Aruba, I can recall the Calypso Festival as part of our yearly tradition. I would regularly go with my parents and or other family members. In the audience at the venue, I remember seeing other family members and friends, with their chairs, snacks, coolers and cold beers in the festival park. It wasn't until sunrise when we found

out who the winners of the contest were. I recall Aruban calypsonians with names, like Lord Boxoe, Mighty Reds, Young Quick Silver, Mighty Stinger, Mighty Talent, Lady K, Mighty Rusty, Long Roy and Mighty Tattoo coming from under the stands at the Lago Sport Park, the venue where the festival would take place, making their way to the stage. During their performances, they would regularly carry out skits on stage assisted by shower curtains, towels, salad bowls, flags, protest signs and all sorts of improvised materials to make their compositions come to life. An aim of these types of skits was to enhance the message of the song, which often involved protest, humor and or sexual innuendo, known as *smut*. Noted calypso historian and playwright Errol Hill talks about the dramatic element of calypso performance being an aspect of folk theater, in what Wolfgang Michael describes as ‘recitation with simple roles’ (E. Hill 2002). I observed that whatever local materials and whichever person was available was used to illustrate their story as best as possible in a community-based setting in which everyone could partake.

As for the preparation of the event, I have observed singers and band members preparing intensely during the run up to the competition. Countless hours and sleepless nights were invested so that they are completely prepared when they go on stage. On the eve of the event, band houses where the musicians train are vibrant yet tense. I understood from some calypsonians and musicians in the field that if they do not perform well in the contest, they would have difficulty getting gigs throughout the entire year. Their livelihood depended on the success of their performances. An indication of how serious calypsonians take this contest can be found in the excerpt of an interview with Aruban calypsonian the Baron. In the documentary *Mighty, Lords, Kings and Queens, Calypso and the Politics of Recognition* (Emanuelson 2015), he said,

*Calypso slash Soca Monarch, is our biggest festival on this island. I think it should have value, who you put on stage. Don't come and say, if I want a comedian. This is serious business. You talking about 50 thousand guilders a band getting. So that's serious money man, you don't make that in a year sitting down talking, just you and me like that. This is going to be our future for the entire year. Depends how well you do on stage, is how well your year is going to end up. You going to get play outs, you going to get people wanting you, your group is going to do good. So if you have it as a joke, stay home!*

Prior to the contest, local radio DJ's and hosts like the popular Ivo Yanez would have call-in sessions during his show, so that fans can give their opinions about the latest songs out. This often leads to hotly debated on-air discussions, which as I have observed, have now branched out to social media like Facebook, where feuds between fans have become even more intense and personal in their attacks on artists and fans alike. I have also observed many popular calypsonians deploy social media to stir the pot, to garner support from their fans, and express their frustrations, especially if they feel that they have been wronged in any way by the carnival committee, or the judges of the Calypso Festival. Music bands have now even formed their own so-called 'posse', or gangs of supporters, who wear their colors and defend their cause at all costs much like the rivalry between fans of European soccer clubs such as Barcelona versus Real Madrid and Ajax versus Feyenoord, short of engaging in fights and other acts of violence. The rivalries however remained mostly rhetorical on the radio and in social media as we will see.

## Calypso's struggle in Aruba



Illustration 10 Diario newspaper opinion piece (early 2000s)

[Calypso is not part of Aruba's culture]

Despite all of calypso's success on Aruba it was certainly not always a bed of roses for the art-form. As I alluded to in the beginning of the chapter, calypso music has had its share of challenges and controversies all throughout its tenure on Aruba. Though many of these discussions will emerge throughout the text, I will briefly list some of the main areas of debate to keep in consideration as we progress. 1) There always seemed to be a discussion with regard to the ownership of calypso music. In other words, who does the music belong to? Did mainly Afro-Caribbean immigrants and their descendants have a patent on the art-form on Aruba or was it something all Arubans could partake in, despite not having the same roots? This point coincides much of the ideas of cultural retention versus assimilation. 2) What language was calypso to be sung in? Was it to be strictly English Creole, or could it also be sung in Papiamentu, the national language of Aruba, or maybe both? 3) Was calypso to be regulated only to the carnival timeslot, thus prior to the Lenten season, or was it allowed to have a space outside of the carnival season? In other words, not to be seen as 'just' carnival music for not

academically trained musicians, but a genre that was worthy of airplay all throughout the year. 4) Could calypso music be considered part of Aruba's 'national' cultural heritage or was it simply a musical genre introduced by oil migrants in the earlier half of the 20th century? Thus, calypso music as a musical genre played *in* Aruba, but not *from* Aruba, a foreign entity so to speak.

Up until recently, one could not participate with a calypso composition in the yearly traditional Aruban music festival, *festival un canto pa nos himno y bandera* [festival, a song for our anthem and flag]. The genres that were only allowed were Aruban versions of waltz, danza, tumba and mazurka, all considered part of the canon of musical genres in Aruba that made its mark prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I should also add, music of European origin. The illustration of the *Diario* newspaper headline above, of an opinion piece stating, *Calypso No ta Cultura di Aruba* [calypso is not the culture of Aruba], embodies the sentiment of the latter point.

## Aruban Calypsonians versus SAC

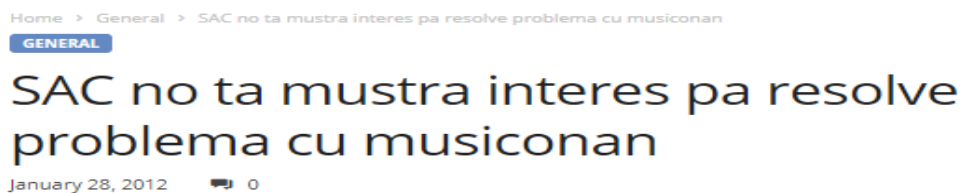


Illustration 11 24ora.com News article Jan 2012

[SAC is not showing any interest in resolving the problems with the musicians]

Not only were there discussions surrounding the above arguments I laid out, rather, more so within the carnival world. In the carnival scene, there seemed to be constant strife between

calypsonians and the SAC, the organization responsible for managing Aruba's carnival. In calypso songs and remarks of many calypsonians, SAC was portrayed as a dominant institution of oppression. For example, the fact that SAC had the absolute legal mandate to control all aspects of carnival season activities from beginning to end, as there were no other organizations who had the right to organize activities during this period, did not sit to well with them. The major complaints by the calypsonians were that they were being commercially exploited by the carnival committee who consisted of mostly, clear complexioned, locally denominated 'white' Arubans, who were mostly descendants of Arubans living on the island prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century oil migration wave.<sup>54</sup> Some have remarked, 'they were only interested in milking us for the dollar while never respecting "our" culture'. In other words, as if their culture was being appropriated by the dominant classes in Aruban society for their personal gain. A general sentiment that I took up was that they felt that that they were being discriminated against with regard to the district they came from, San Nicolas, and seemingly experienced that they had little power in the decisions that were made about the carnival and calypso that 'they' introduced to the island. An argument that you would often hear, especially in the 1980s, is that calypsonians would fill the stadium for the calypso contest, and generate a lot of money for the carnival organization yet get next to nothing in prize money, for example compared to the Tumba Festival.

The Tumba Festival is a strictly Papiamentu language song contest, also organized during carnival on Aruba, but held in Oranjestad. In a way symbolically identified by some as the music from *pabou*. The Tumba is a musical genre that bears the same name as the conga drum and is

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<sup>54</sup> Black Caribbean societies have had a long tradition of selecting white, 'light skin' or mulatto leaders. See Haiti, Jamaica, Cuba and the Dominican Republic as examples.

considered to be typical of the Dutch ABC islands. Tumba singers are called *tumberos*. There is both a traditional Tumba played throughout the entire year, and the Tumba *carnevelesco*, which is played typically during carnival. On the islands of Curacao and Bonaire it is the most popular musical genre during their carnivals while in Aruba it is less popular. Rhythm wise, the Tumba shares little in common with the calypso thus the two are quite distinct.

Though the call and response aspect are also present in the music, Tumba could be considered a *mélange* of West African, European and Spanish Caribbean influences. Some of the main instruments include various types of drums, the cowbell, wiri (long metal object with ribbles), keyboard, shakers, horn instruments such as trumpet and trombone and more. To the musically unfamiliar ear, the Tumba would sound more like a Latin musical genre such as salsa, with heavy West African drum patterns with a constant vocal and musical interchange.

The themes of the Tumba's are much more celebratory than the traditional Critical-Calyпсо which focusses much more on satire and critique. Tumberos mostly focus on cultural heritage, history, nation building and the enjoyment of the carnival celebrations. Song titles would sound like, *Aruba ban celebre*, [Aruba let's celebrate] *Nos carnaval ta unico* [Our carnival is unique], *Aruba mi dushi pais* [Aruba my beautiful country].

The first Tumba contest was held in 1971 and steadily grew in popularity and at a given moment, especially in the late 80s, was rivaling the Calypso Festival for the most popular local contest on the island. It was held yearly in the Wilhelmina Stadium in Oranjestad. Mostly people from *pabou* were the ones whom attended the Tumba festival. The majority of the participants were thus also native Papiamentu speakers. Below are some images from the first Tumba contest held in Aruba in 1971.



**Illustration 12 Esso News article and photos of the First Tumba contest in Aruba at the Wilhelmina Stadium 1971**

Another gripe of the calypsonians during the 80s were what they felt was the special attention the *Reina di carnival concursos* [carnival queen pageants] were getting. Their main complaint was that these 'clear complexioned' queens, would get cars and other fancy gifts as their winnings yet calypsonians would receive nothing in prize money. Similar examples can be found in Latin America, in countries such as Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador and Brazil where a considerable part of the population is of African descent yet are not represented in beauty contests, in magazines and as news anchors.<sup>55</sup> Below is an illustration of the 1971 youth carnival queen election, also held in the Wilhelmina stadium in Oranjestad.

<sup>55</sup> See Henry Louis Gates jr's documentary on Black in Latin America for a in depth view of racialized politics and colorism. Also see Too Black for Brazil documentary on struggles of the Globeleza carnival queen in 2013.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S0ODz9aIQ\\_k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S0ODz9aIQ_k)

Also see documentary on Cartagena Afro Colombian pageant <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-thL6aApleo>





**Illustration 13** Esso News photo of the 1971 youth queen election in the Wilhelmina Stadium

At this juncture, I will provide some calypso texts to exemplify some of the phenomena discussed above. I will not go into much detail here, but instead I will attempt to bring home to the reader what the general feeling amongst many calypsonians was like.

Calypsonian Mighty Talent and Young Spitfire illustrate this frustration in their songs ‘Shut up your Mouth’ and ‘How things Was’.

### **Shut up your mouth (1989)<sup>56</sup>**

#### **Mighty Talent**

A question I got for so long  
 Please correct me if I am wrong  
 As I remember so far, carnival queens use to win a car  
 SAC, *regala* a Mazda 929, [donate]  
 A second hand Fiat will do just fine  
 But to No, Queen show!  
 But to the King of this Calypso!  
 I ain’t joking, take me seriously

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<sup>56</sup> Track # 2 verse 2 on YouTube channel

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjZkZyYy8Al\\_t4iOIfkhk7Yg](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjZkZyYy8Al_t4iOIfkhk7Yg)

For years now, you make plenty money  
 The song say, don't worry be happy  
*Si bo no worry, mi no ta ban sigui* [if you do not worry, I will not continue 'singing']

### **How things was (1982)<sup>57</sup>**

#### **Young Spitfire**

Tumba Contest and Queen Election  
 All that came on TV  
 But for the Calypsonian Contest,  
 Not one singer, we ain't see  
 Some people talk, but can't find a solution  
 But I think is pure damn a color question  
 I wonder why, I wrote this song  
 We had enough, it had been going on too long  
*Carnaval di Aruba si ta carnival* [Carnival in Aruba, is really a good Carnival]  
 But without kaiso [calypso] it's no good at all!

As you can see, referring back to Aruba was not free from the elements of racialism and classism. These contradictory elements were very much present but it's acknowledgement and severity all depended on who you asked, when and in what context it took place.<sup>58</sup> This goes back to the introductory chapter in which I spoke about the Narratives of the One Happy Island and the ways Arubans dealt with controversial issues such as race and identity.

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<sup>57</sup> Track # 3 verse 2 on YouTube channel

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjzKzZyYy8Al\\_t4iOlfkhk7Yg](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjzKzZyYy8Al_t4iOlfkhk7Yg)

<sup>58</sup> See Francio Guadeloupe's (2009) article 'Their modernity matters too: the invisible links between Black Atlantic identity formations in the Caribbean and consumer capitalism in *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies*, 4 (3), 271-292 for a nuanced discussion on racial identity politics in the Caribbean and Aruba.

## SAC versus the Aruban calypsonian

Home > General > Musiconan no por secuestra Carnaval di Aruba!

GENERAL

### Musiconan no por secuestra Carnaval di Aruba!

January 23, 2012 1

#### Illustration 14 Diario online news article Musicians cannot hijack the carnival of Aruba (Jan 23, 2012)

SAC and their supporters, whom included some calypso music fans and even some calypsonians, were in turn critical of the way some calypsonians conducted themselves and of what they felt was some calypsonians' unfair criticism of SAC. I have heard high-ranking SAC officials say on radio interviews that the Calypso Festival does not generate as much money as people say it does, that sometimes they even suffer losses and their partnership with certain sponsors are necessary to cover expenses. The headline above embodies this sentiment.

Furthermore, some SAC supporters have alleged that many calypsonians are just 'greedy' for money. I would often hear people say that it was actually the calypsonians who were making a distinction between themselves and the rest of the population of the island, and causing a division in society. Here is what a long-standing member of the SAC (Daimara), had to say about the criticism geared in their direction.<sup>59</sup>

There is a lot of blame to go around with regard to the treatment of the musicians. We definitely had our role. It is however important to remember that as an organization we have the responsibility to make sure that everything is organized accordingly. We have a responsibility towards the public as well. The people pay their money, so the event should start on time and finish on time. It is also important, that there are rules. For safety reasons, that none of the performers get hurt. Furthermore, we also have a responsibility towards the citizens in the community with regard to their good name. You can't just go insulting whomever in what way you please. In everything there are rules.

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<sup>59</sup> Interview with prominent member of the SAC in 2016. SAC's position is also continuously represented throughout the text but a greater emphasis is put on the articulations of the calypsonian.

## Lack of unity amongst musicians

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Vi Maarten di ASOMA

# **Mester di mas union cerca Musiconan**

Illustration 15 Diario newspaper headline article stating 'There needs to be more unity amongst musicians' (Nov 2005)

For years Aruban calypsonians have tried to organize themselves under different organizations such as ASOMA (*Asosacion Musico Arubano*) and later *Fundacion MUSICA*. They have however failed to become an organized force largely due to alleged mismanagement of money, jealousy and infighting. Vi Maarten, the then president of ASOMA declared in a 2005 address, that there was little communication and collaboration amongst musicians as the above Diario newspaper headline suggests.

The level of distrust amongst musicians and the competitive nature of calypso competitions, was evident in my conversations with the different musical bands. They may have respected their peers somewhat, but did not like them personally and had barely anything positive to say about them. In a radio interview on the Soca Train Show with soca DJ Easy B, the late Aruban music producer Hildward '*El Principe*' Croes said that 'we musicians have lots of trust issues'. Despite the many attempts to overthrow the SAC, they have remained in existence

and in control for over 60 years, surely a testament to their staying power and position in society.<sup>60</sup>

## Critique of the calypsonian and calypso music by the community

Home > General > Pueblo rabia cu musiconan ta kibra acuerdo firma boycoteando Calypso y Road...

GENERAL

### Pueblo rabia cu musiconan ta kibra acuerdo firma boycoteando Calypso y Road March Contest

January 24, 2012 0

**Illustration 1624 ora.com news article (Jan 2012)**

**‘The people are upset with musicians for breaking off their agreement and thus are boycotting the Calypso and Roadmarch contest’**

On another front, some calypso elders, normally supportive of what they consider to be ‘authentic’ calypsonians, have become increasingly critical of a number of performers. Some calypso elders, including Lord Cobashi, Mighty Reds and Young Quick Silver have expressed the sentiment that many prominent calypsonians are rarely critical anymore and are only in it for themselves, not for the love. Some calypsonians have even become politically affiliated and thus have become mouthpieces for the government. Some elders have asked, ‘how can you be a calypsonian and on the payroll of the government? Those two don’t mix’.

They also claim that calypsonians themselves have become very money driven and charge extremely high fees for their compositions and arrangements for community projects such

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<sup>60</sup> As of 2015 SAC is no longer responsible for organizing Aruba’s carnival. At the time the research was conducted. Up until then, SAC was still in power.

as children's festivals, with the consequence that the participation of the economically less affluent and thus also the democratic 'voice of the poor' have been effectively excluded.<sup>61</sup>

Not only have calypsonians been the target of critique from within the carnival world, but they have also been criticized by groups outside of this setting. For example, serious critique has been levelled towards calypso music and calypsonians from Christian religious conservatives in Aruba. Over 70% of the island's population identifies as Roman Catholic (CBS 2010). The actual dates of the carnival period, are determined by the Catholic pre-Lenten calendar, which allows for the temporary 'indulgence' in the *carni* [flesh] up until Ash Wednesday, when King Momo is burnt to ashes signifying the end of the festivities and the commencement of the Lenten season (Razak 1997).

Calypso music and carnival however have been preached against especially in conservative Evangelical / neo Pentecostal churches because of its intrinsic link with both Catholicism and carnival celebrations. They have been adamant in stating that they do not condone carnival and all its 'unholy' grotesque debaucheries.<sup>62</sup> During these services, mostly held in rented ware-houses or old storefronts, the preachers often shout in charismatic fashion from the top of their lungs that '*carnaval, ta di satanas*' [carnival is of the devil] and that '*nos como Cristian, no por participa, na e festival mundano aki*' [we as Christians cannot take part in these worldly festivals], to some cheers of the congregation. In order to discourage the congregation from attending these activities, these churches organize retreats at the beach during carnival weekend.

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<sup>61</sup> Personal communication of Mighty Heads, Kenworth Myers, whom is a calypsonian, social critic and competition judge (2011).

<sup>62</sup> There is much literature on the critique of carnival (like) activities by Pentecostal church movements in the Caribbean. See Religion, Diaspora and Cultural Identity: A Reader in the Anglophone Caribbean by J.W. Pulis 1999.

While the protestant schools on the island do not organize carnival related activities, most catholic schools have carnival queen elections and talent shows. I was once asked to give a workshop at a local protestant school on the island about calypso music. The headmaster of the school was quite critical of calypso music and made it clear to me that I should not encourage ‘sexual songs’, as that would be immoral.

Interestingly enough, in recent years, modern charismatic churches have to some extent embraced calypso music itself as an evangelizing tool, appropriating it to gain converts through what is known as Gospelypso. The infectious rhythms and the chants can be frequently heard in these churches and *breakaways* and perhaps *jouissance* may also be said to be experienced in the process. The only difference is that the lyrics that are used are about the love of Christ. This tendency has already reached the point where at times you can’t tell the difference between regular carnival calypso and Gospelypso.<sup>63</sup>

*Calypso ta nos cultura...sometimes!*

PAGINA 28

DIARIO

DIABIerna 18 NOVEMBER 2005

Director Instituto di Cultura

## **Calypso ta parti di nos bida na Aruba**

Illustration 17 Diario newspaper article headline stating ‘Calypso is part of Life in Aruba’ (Nov 2005)

<sup>63</sup> On Pentecostal appropriations of popular culture in the Caribbean see Caribbean Religious History: An Introduction by Ennis B. Edmonds and Michelle A. Gonzalez (chapter legitimation, indigenization, and contextualization). Also see Nationalism and the Soul: Gospelypso as Independence by T Rommen 2002. This example has been presented as a glimpse of some of the interpretations. However, it is not the focus of this study.

Regardless of all the criticism from some corners in the community there has been a concerted effort by lawmakers and officials in the field of music and culture to recognize calypso as ‘*nos cultura*’ [our culture]. A November 18, 2005 headline in the *Diario* newspaper read *Calypso ta parti di nos bida na Aruba* [calypso is part of our life on Aruba]. This was a statement given by the then director of the Department of culture. He declared publicly that, ‘we have many different musical genres on the island, when we analyze the history, we cannot get around the fact that calypso is part of our culture, despite what the critics say’.

In 2008 a motion was even presented in parliament by member of parliament, Carmelita Haynes, a representative of San Nicolas, to officially declare calypso as a part the national heritage of Aruba. The Feb 20<sup>th</sup> 2008 headline in the Dutch language newspaper *Amigoe di Aruba* read *Staten unaniem achter motie Haynes: Calypso behoort tot national erfgoed*. [unanimous support for motion Haynes: calypso is part of our national heritage]

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*Staten unaniem achter motie Haynes*  
**Calypso behoort  
 tot nationaal erfgoed**

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Illustration 18 Amigoe newspaper headline article stating  
 ‘Unanimous support for motion Haynes: calypso is part of our national heritage’ (Feb 2008)

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We can conclude that although calypso music in Aruba has become immensely popular, it has always seemed to be embroiled in some sort of controversy. Whether about the language that calypso should be sung in, where the contest should be held, who the judges of the contest



should be, who is allowed to sing calypso, who the creators of the art form are and what the music should sound like. Therefore, Aruba's relationship with calypso music can best be portrayed as what persons in the district of San Nicolas would call '*sometime-ish*'. *Sometime-ish* refers to a person who is not consistent in their dealings. Someone who might greet you one day and on another just pass you by, or someone who only acts nice to you when they need you, but when that is not the case, they show indifference. To sum it up, it's a sort of an on again off again relationship or maybe what some would say a 'friends with benefits' affair.

Outside of carnival season, some in the political and economic classes in Aruba have not paid much attention to calypso, except when the music has been seen as necessary to help articulate some of the Narratives of the One Happy Island. During carnival, calypso has been celebrated as being the 'voice of the people' and the main source of musical entertainment *musica di carnaval*, while in other contexts, the music and its performers have been characterized as inappropriate, vulgar and promoting *libertinahe* [a free sexual lifestyle].

On the island, calypso has been widely considered to be a musical genre just for the carnival period that does not have much cultural importance elsewhere. It has not been considered to be 'high culture' by conservatory trained musicians, as most calypsonians have not been formally trained. While calypsonians might be overbooked during the carnival season, they might not be able get a gig when the season has passed. Calypso DJs and calypso elders might shout in the wilderness that calypso music rarely gets airplay after carnival for other genres like merengue, bachata, EDM, hip hop, reggae and pop music while during carnival they might be celebrated as heroes of Aruban culture.

The relationship between the calypso world with all its actors and some of the Narratives of the One Happy Island has been very ambiguous. On the one hand, the calypso world has

attempted to oppose these narratives, and depict them as oppressive discourses that needed to be unpacked, a deceitful façade that has to be called out and punctured by the *bad john*. On the other hand, the calypso world itself has often been very closely linked to the flash, the glitz and the glamour associated with some of the Narratives of the One Happy Island by his alter ego, the *sagaboy*, often through the party oriented Roadmarch-Calypso.

During the carnival period, calypso has opened up one of the few spaces in Aruba where people of different backgrounds and status could discuss some of these Narratives of the One Happy in an open fashion. Calypsonians and their listeners could reinforce these narratives by for example claiming that Aruba was the greatest place on earth, or they could dismiss it as nothing but a myth to distract the island's population from attending to the many obstacles we have been facing as a nation.

In sum, I have found that much of my personal interest as well as much of the popular interest in calypso music and the wider calypso culture in Aruba to be related to its participatory aspect. In spite of its seasonal nature, carnival has created a public space where everyone might have an opinion and might make these opinions known.

## PART II

### Chapter 5

#### A Portrayal of Mighty Talent:

#### Critical-Mele-Calypso and the Narratives of the One Happy Island

*Pueblo, tell me if I lie? yuh ain't lie...*  
 Calypso ta *Redo* [Gossip]  
 Mighty Talent

#### Notes of childhood memories at Calypso festival

*The rays of the morning sun were already beginning to show over the eastern tip of the island now dubbed as the sunrise city, but in those days, we called it Chocolate City. Many lyrical professors, to the sounds of 'tiki-tungkutung, tiki-tungkutung' graced the stage, tackling issues ranging from the inability of the government to manage the budget to social issues such as teenage pregnancy and gossip talk like who is sleeping with whom in the community. After many hours of waiting in the morning dew, the MC announced the name of the reigning calypso king; 'Mighty Talent'. The weary crowd instantly transformed into jubilee. Comparable to Mohammed Ali in his heyday, a dark, curly kitted fellow as arrogant as can be, in San Nicolas Creole English said: 'A win already, ohyu go home' without even uttering one lyric. The crowd even became wilder but then slowly calmed down to the point you could hear a pin drop in a crowd of more than 8000. What happened next was awesome, it was 5 minutes of love, lyrical precision, improvisation, humor, political commentary and rhythmic expression the island hears and feels only once a year. (Richardson & Richardson 2012b, 56)*

The above notes are part of a story that I published about one of my experiences with calypso music, in which, I reflected for the first time on a calypso performance by Mighty Talent, considered one of the most accomplished calypsonians Aruba has ever known. In conversations

with many of my peers, they also recalled having similar memories. We all recognized Mighty Talent as a larger than life figure. An Aruban calypsonian that was popular, commanded respect and was extremely talented. He could play the piano, sing really well, entertain and captivate his audience and improvise on the spot in a remarkable way. We would remember that if any calypsonian dared to challenge his reign, in an improvised fashion, they would receive a lyrical tongue lashing that would teach them to never challenge him again. He would reserve his last verse to counter any calypsonian who had previously challenged him. ‘Not even the prime minister, the governor or the Queen of the Netherlands commanded such attention as when he was on stage’, were the remarks of some on the island. We hung on his every word that departed from his lips. There could be many other good calypsonians on stage that night, but the question that everyone would ask, is ‘Did mighty Talent sing already?’ or if he already performed, ‘What did he sing about?’ The Lago Sport Park would become symbolically the sphere where he was the wizard waving his wand.

Considered to be a Stevie Wonder-esque *wunderkind* by his musical peers, he received a partial scholarship from the Aruban government to attend the esteemed Berklee College of Music in Boston, but he never completed his degree for reasons unknown (Razak 1997). In the 1980s, Berklee College of music was a popular destination for world class musicians and for artists of the Global South. Local governments would subsidize parts of their tuition. The famous Dominican singer and musician Juan Luis Guerra, who’s global hits include ‘*Frio Frio*’ and ‘*Café del Campo*’ was among their alumni.

Mighty Talent is the undisputed winner of calypso competitions on the island of Aruba. He has won over 30 Calypso Festival titles and has countless other prizes to his name (Emanuelson 2015). Next to his talent for calypso he is considered one of the most commercially

successful entertainers to come out Aruba. Hits like ‘*Contempo*’, ‘*Saca e Boem*’ [expose your buttocks], ‘*Boquet di flor*’ [flower bouquet], ‘*Habri bo brasa*’ [Open your arms], ‘*Paga e luz*’ [Turn off the lights] and a host of other Papiamentu language songs have made him a household name, not only in Aruba, but throughout the entire Dutch Kingdom. This has made him loved very much by many in the community, but also criticized by some. This tension will be later elaborated on, in relation to *plaisir*, *jouissance* and the Narratives of the One Happy Island.

But what was it that made Mighty Talent’s music and personality so appealing to some of us? How did he merit such high esteem by the public and researchers alike? And why was he the darling of the Dutch Caribbean and its diaspora? Why was I fascinated by his performances, and what compelled me to deconstruct his lyrics in my university lectures? Not only that, why, was he sometimes so vehemently criticized?

Using my anthropological tools, mostly interviews, participant observations, sessions of ‘deep hanging out’ and song lyrics analyses, I have attempted to answer these questions. The song texts and analysis, I will present in the second half of the chapter because I want to give an exposé on Mighty Talent, the person, beforehand. My main goal during my interviews and interactions with him was to find out how he saw the development of calypso music and how he placed himself within its long trajectory; and more importantly, how he engaged with some of the Narratives of the One Happy Island. As you will see later, what I coin as the Critical-*Mele*-Calypso approach (Richardson 2015), has been his main tool of engagement.

Critical-*Mele*-calypso is a term used to describe the type of Critical-Calypso that utilizes the method of *mele*, a term used in the English Caribbean for ‘gossip’, to touch on controversial issues normally not openly spoken to avoid ruffling too many feathers (Allsopp & Allsopp 2003, 379). Variations such as *shushu* [soft talk] *hiba trece* [carry bring], bad talk, malicious talk, idle

talk, slander, chatter, hearsay and many more are also used all throughout the region in the different languages and dialects.

My analysis of the works of Mighty Talent show a gradual shift in his approach towards some of the Narratives of the One Happy Island in the course of his career. In the pre-90s era, he positions himself as a critical, African retentionist, monolingual calypsonian from San Nicolas, confronting the some of the Narratives of the One Happy Island in a pretty straightforward way.<sup>64</sup> In the post 90s (95) era, he adopts a Critical-*Mele*-Calypso approach, and becomes the creole, pluri-lingual, Anansi calypsonian. He did not just want to be a singer representing only one part of the island, but rather the entire island and further, the entire Dutch Caribbean and its diaspora. In this period, he takes on the role of the anchor who reports the news, but does not take full responsibility for it. The saying, ‘don’t kill the messenger’ fits this mode. As mentioned earlier, the sobriquet, the calypso name, helps with a certain level of immunity, because for brief moment on stage, he is given a momentary ‘license to kill’ so to speak. Even this license had its code of conduct as we will see.

Initially I thought that Critical-*Mele*-Calypso was the key to the puzzle in letting the world see Aruba as it ‘really’ is, and not the simulacra, sanitized, *Disney-esque* version presented by some of the Narratives of the One Happy Island. My research journey of the past years has, however, made me realize that my findings were incomplete.

In the final analysis, I will argue why he still failed to completely unsettle, deconstruct, and derail most of the Narratives of the One Happy Island, despite Mighty Talent’s magnificent usage of the expressive range of Critical-*Mele*-Calypso, and the skills he possessed.

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<sup>64</sup> Examples are here not given of this particular approach not to complicate the sequence of my narrative. Ample examples will be given further along in the text.

## On Critical-Calypso and Gossip

Now, before I argue my change of position, it is necessary to explain why so many people including myself consider Critical-*Mele*-Calypso to be one of the ultimate means of exposing some of the Narratives of the One Happy Island; and how Mighty Talent persuasively utilized this genre like no other. How this is linked to the wider literature on gossip in so far, as it is relevant to this study will be elaborated upon.

With regard to a close-knit society like that on Aruba, where many people know each other or at least know from which clan you came, the calypsonian as the traditional ‘voice of the people’, had to develop different ways of engaging with the Narratives of the One Happy Island in ways that would keep the society in relative calm. The complete disruption of society was not at all the main purpose of the calypsonian but rather by means of skillful wordplay as a so-called ‘*man o words*’ (Burton 1997, 187). ‘Man o words’ here would be a sort of an English speaking Caribbean version of ‘wordsmith’ or what Roger Abrahams (1970) calls ‘eloquent speech’. This is to send out a warning or even reprimand the alleged culprits, mostly the dominant classes, if one did not adhere to the societal norms. In Aruba, we saw that Critical-*Mele*-Calypso was often used as a medium to entice and carefully feed the audience with the juicy details of Aruba’s veiled narratives. One could say that *mele* was something very melodious and expressive. For example when *mele* was verbally being transferred back and forth on the street corners, in the church pews, beauty salons, barbershops and rumshops this happened in a calypso-esque musical sphere, that was made even more exciting by the high and low pitch tonalities and gasps of the ‘*Oh Yeah!*, *Aha!*, *Who Say So!*’ and the ‘*Fo True!*’

When someone was in the process of carrying out *mele*, Arubans would say, that person is ‘*ponging mele*’ or in Papiamentu ‘*e persona ey ta bati bleki*’ [beating pan]. *Ponging* in English Creole and *bati* in Papiamentu meant to beat, or to hit. It is usually used in reference to some sort of drum. The beating of a pan or pot in Aruba could represent both a sweet rhythm and or noise in every day talk. Its meaning was relational as it could be interpreted in multiple ways depending on the circumstances. For example, if a steelpan player, known as a pan man is producing nice music and is giving a good show, folks would say, ‘*he ponging sweet*’. Sweet here is understood as pleasurable. But if the same pan man is not giving a good show, and music is not up to the liking of the crowd, they could say ‘*he ponging shit*’. This could be an indication that *mele* could be experienced as both positive and negative.

Anthropologist, Donald Brenneis, in his studies of the Fiji Indians in South East Asia, also recognized that it was not simply the act of gossip that provided insider information but it was other variables such as style, semantics, tone, intent and overall history that was more important (Brenneis 1984, 496). In Aruba, our relationship with *mele* is very contextual. In a sense, it was information that we all craved and enjoyed while at the same time, and in certain settings it was something that we frowned upon or at least told to view as a negative by many in the community.

Perhaps some other anthropological literature on gossip may help us to unearth some of the social mechanisms at play of the Critical-*Mele*-Calypso of Mighty Talent in so far relevant specifically in the calypso world. Cultural anthropologists long understood how important the activity, understood as gossip, was to acquire a better understanding of societies workings. John Haviland, in his longitudinal studies on gossip, reputation and knowledge in Central American Mayan communities for example wrote: ‘Understanding gossip thus presupposes a degree of



intimacy with persons and events that is rarely attained by an anthropologist' (Haviland 1977, 171-182). Haviland even went as far as to say that 'understanding gossip, amounts to understanding culture' (171-182). Whether this is true or not, he recognized the importance of gossip as a means of inquiry but he was also honest enough to recognize that it was a large and complicated task rarely attained by anyone. In a sense, he knew that the locals would take him and his colleagues for a ride if he didn't understand the whole process involved. It involved much more than the simple transfer of evaluative information from one party to another in the absence of a third party as often thought. Gossip styles could take on an array of forms be it personal or in the public space as we will see with *Mighty Talent*.

In the anthropology on gossip two framings stand out as being especially relevant as it relates to *Mighty Talent's* approach towards the Narratives of the One Happy Island. One is found in the pioneering study of Max Gluckman, a structural functionalist, whose perspective on gossip has been fairly optimistic as he saw it as a natural and necessary occurrence in every society to maintain itself. The other has been developed by Robert Paine, who saw the concept of gossip as having the potential of being very destructive. This has become known as the transactionalist position.

Gluckman argues that gossip's primary function in society,

...is maintaining morals, values and unity of social groups by restating their moral codes, providing a way of controlling, competing cliques and aspiring members, making possible the reflection of leaders without direct confrontation and embarrassment maintain exclusive 'we' groups. (Gluckman 1963, 308)

He also wrote that the internal struggle within the group could be fought and could conceal malice by means of gossip and this could take place 'primarily by subtle innuendo, and by pointed ambiguities' (308).

Paine in contrast to Gluckman is less optimistic about the cohesive role of gossip. In reference to the importance of gossip he wrote 'whatever else it may be in a functional sense, it is also a cultural device used by an individual to further his own interest' (Paine 1967, 282). In other words, it was often times used strategically to advance one's position at the expense of another. There were serious and often times negative consequences that went along with this.

In this context gossip is also often linked with themes of *us vs. them* (Gelles 1989). The sharing of damaging sentiments towards commonly known persons contributes in a major way to the exclusion of these groups and perhaps may even encourage feelings of closeness; having a common enemy (Bosson et al. 2006; Weaver and Bosson 2011). In this context Norbert Elias and John Scotson's 1965 study of established-outsider relations between the inhabitants of the so called 'village' and the 'estate' in a working-class community in Britain provides a good example of the complexities of identity and inequality in relation to the dominant classes and the upholding of unequal relationships of power and authority. The 'villagers', the dominant class, are able to define their own collective identity, using what is interpreted as 'praise gossip' based on a cohesion of the elite. On the other hand, the collective identity of residents of the 'estate', the marginalized, is largely defined by the dominant class, using what has been interpreted as 'blame gossip' based on a minority of the worst (Kay 2005, 1-2). The non-established, 'outsider' group, is thus easily ostracized by this means with little possibility for advancement.

Undoubtedly, gossip did harm: it could be used to maintain political power and undermine the poor and working class; it could be used to excommunicate people from their communities, it could be used to fuel family rivalries, it could be used as reason to commit violent acts against loved ones; and it could even be used as a reason to commit suicide.

However, this same means of exclusion could also be used as a weapon to fight the same established groups that were oppressing them in the first place. When the oppressed ‘outsider’ takes ownership of the process, showing agency, they used these same means as a weapon. For example, studies on *chirigota* musical groups in Cadiz Spain, a direct result of the restriction of carnival under Franco’s rule, show how ‘folk *conhuntos*’, similar to the Caribbean calypsonians, both in official and ‘illegal’ performances, use an array of methods, such as satire, irony and gossip to critique and pass judgment on society’s doings in general, and especially the political elite (Gilmore 1998). Niko Besnier gives a clear example of this in the following statement:

Because gossip is particularly difficult to repress or contain; it frequently emerges as an instrument of protest and resistance in the hands of those with restricted access to more overt forms of political actions. It thus can provide a political voice to individuals and groups (e.g women, younger people, underdogs) that are excluded from more overt political processes. (Besnier 1996, 546)

Especially in the case of Mighty Talent, we see how the same destructive methods could be used in calypso songs to challenge the ruling classes. What makes the case of Mighty Talent even more appealing is that it is, in contrast to Paine and Gluckman, whom to some degree focused mostly on gossip in a day-to-day setting where there is some control as to who will get what information, Mighty Talent operates in the calypso public sphere where he sings ‘praise calypso’ and ‘blame calypso’ and where, control over who gets information is much more difficult to realize. It was not illicit information sharing between A and B, outside the presence of C, but rather, information sharing between A and B in the presence of C, D, E and F so to speak. In a *writerly* way, to reference Barthes, the listening crowd takes ownership of that information where it takes on a life of its own. Even so, the calypsonian operates in such an Anansi manner, where wordplay is used on such an advanced level, that he keeps the crowd guessing. Much like Michael Tausig’s interpretation of the concept ‘the public secret’, as we will see in the next

paragraphs, the proverbial big elephant in the room is addressed without officially being addressed.

### The Mighty Talent Encounter

Interestingly enough, having analyzed many of Mighty Talent's compositions throughout much of my academic work (Richardson 2015), I've never had a chance to sit with him for an interview. Perhaps I was too intimidated to approach him, or maybe he just wasn't that accessible. At least in my impression. However, writing this dissertation provided the perfect opportunity to find out how he engaged with the some of the Narratives of the One Happy Island. Different people I spoke to, told me that he was a bit standoffish and difficult to get in contact with. I thought, which popular artists doesn't have a bit of an ego? How else do you go on stage and perform for the masses. I was even told that he let people wait for hours outside of his home before he attended to them. Then again, you can't always believe the *mele*, or can you?

After contacting him with a Facebook message, we made an appointment at his home in Wayaca, an upscale neighborhood, a few minutes away from the airport. He promptly came out to receive me when I arrived. So much for the rumors! When I first spoke to him at his home, he was a bit apprehensive, as if he did not know who I was, or what my intentions were. As you would say in Dutch, '*de kat uit de boom kijken*'. But as the conversation developed, he opened up, and was quite friendly, even candid about his career and his prospects for the future. You could sense, he was still somewhat calculated in his answers. We would stay in contact after.

Mighty Talent is dark complexioned and almost two meters tall. In Aruba we would call him *color scur* [dark skinned]. He has a low fade haircut, about 3 inches high. He is in his late 40s. His sleepy yet poignant eyes and ivory-white teeth make a lasting impression on anyone

who meets him. I could see why he is a larger-than-life personality in Aruba, he had a presence about him. He started the interview by telling me that he was the son of St Martin (Dutch Caribbean) immigrants, came out of a big musical family on *Nijhofstraat* in San Nicolas. Most of his brothers and sisters can either sing or play instruments. His mother was also very musical, she was a choir member at the Methodist Church in San Nicolas, which the young Mighty Talent also attended. He got his first break as a performer during a talent show. It was through events like these his musical and performance skills were honed.

He recounted how he used to sneak into the hotels to see the shows of rhythm and blues and soul music acts from the U.S. These performances made an enormous impression on him and propelled him on his quest to become an accomplished and well-rounded entertainer who could effectively cross musical genres. His neighbor, also a calypsonian, Lord Boxoe, greatly influenced him as at Boxoe's home he played the piano for the first time, as well as, his first steel drum. He began performing as a young teenager in different festivals, locally and internationally with the biggest being the Latin American song festival OTI (*Organización de Televisión Iberoamericana*) in 1983 in Washington, D.C. where he placed third. He went on to sing with different bands, eventually forming his own; OREO (One Real Electrifying Organization) in the late 90s.

When asked about his particular calypso approach, he told me the following.

*Calypsonians are like reporters! I usually look at newspapers throughout the year and give a review of what has been going on. I try to do this in a serious and humorous way, which is actually quite difficult because you have to try and cram everything in under five minutes. Most calypsonians don't realize that it takes much more to win than just to get up on stage and sing a calypso. They find it strange that I win all the time. But you have to know your crowd and the people standing in front of you. You have to make them curious about what you have to say.*

When it came to his approach with regards to him being a Critical-*Mele*-Calypsonian as a truth teller, mouthpiece of the poor he said,

*Well, Aruba is very small, everyone is linked to each other in some way or form, either by being a family member, a colleague or just an acquaintance. So when composing a calypso, you have to take all these things into account. There is a skill to it. You just can't go naming names and being too obvious. Aruba is a small island and people get upset, they know who you are and where you live....People rarely get upset with me because I sing about them; even politicians begged me to sing about them. Politicians know that if I sang about them, they would be in the spotlight, even if that spotlight is a critical one, it's one that everybody can get a laugh out of.*

Here he clearly distinguishes mere gossip as discussed earlier from calypso gossip, performed in the public sphere. There was a clear approach within the context of calypso in the public sphere.

I also got the impression that some politicians, knew that it was better to befriend the calypsonian, during the so called during carnival rather than be their enemy. At least in this space, they still could indirectly control things, under the guise of self-criticism. This philosophy resembled, how I heard people in Aruba respond to criticism. They say '*it is better for people to be talking about you. When they are not talking about you, you should be worried*'. There is also Papiamentu saying that encapsulates this idea, '*Mal fama, tambe ta fama*', which means bad publicity is also publicity. It still keeps the politician center stage and in control of the narrative.

He went on further to say,

*That is why I never presented myself as a supporter of any political party. I sing about all governments in power. It does not matter who is in power. I just choose my words carefully and do it in a smart way, always with a sense of respect. I do not go after anyone, unless they attack first.*

It was already becoming clear that his Critical-*Mele*-Calypso style was an approach where semantics, tone and intent, were key elements of Mighty Talent's calypso style. Local calypso DJ Ronnie Emanuela also known as DJ Baba Charlie, calls him 'the master of disguise; the magician' in reference to the way he presents himself and his wordplay. He dedicated a lot of

attention to his performance and his articulation. His words have to be clear and understandable for everyone. I was under the impression that he knew that he could not just employ a frontal attack. It seemed that he knew that, the harder you attacked, the harder they resisted. He was very critical of calypsonians who were not careful when presenting their calypso's. He said:

*...you have to avoid using names, and you can't be too personal...you have to say, the thing, without actually saying it...it's all about double meaning...you have to leave the audience, think, hey... he could have meant that or...hey, but he could of meant that also.*

He brought forward cases of calypsonians suffering negative consequences if they don't package their message tactfully. For example, in the case of another calypsonian, by the name of Mighty Ringo. Mighty Ringo's 'Calypso Man', was a big hit but it was also, very controversial. In the song, the calypsonian presented himself as a man telling tales of different events that happened throughout the year. One verse dealt with a case of arson related to an alleged adulterous affair involving a politician and his girlfriend on the island. Another was on an alleged gay relationship between a calypsonian and another famous Aruban singer. Even though he never mentioned names personally, he was quite specific in the hints he gave in his song, not camouflaged very well according to Mighty Talent, resulting in personal threats against Mighty Ringo. In a conversation with Mighty Ringo, he told me that he received an anonymous phone call from a person who said that if he performed 'Calypso Man' on the final night of the calypso competition he would suffer the consequences. He eventually filed a complaint to the police, and he did go on to sing on the final night and nothing ever happened.

Another example is that of calypsonian Smoking Joe, who openly criticized a particular political party who at the time was very popular in San Nicolas. Smoking Joe was in his prime as a calypsonian but that did not deter the crowd from booing him and chasing him off the stage. Fellow calypsonians said that he was seen leaving the venue in tears. After that incident, he

rarely scored a hit again and is remembered by the calypso elders and the rest of the calypso world as someone who committed career suicide. Time and time again he is used as an example of the fine line one has to tread when singing a Critical-*Mele*-Calypso in Aruba. In the next paragraphs some calypso song text examples will be given of how this functioned.

As to the future of the calypso art form in Aruba, Mighty Talent is not that positive. He said '*calypso ain't entirely dead yet but they already keeping the funeral services*'. He doesn't see many youngsters picking up the art form as they seem to prefer to sing Roadmarch-Calypso. He was quite pessimistic. He considers himself and other musicians of his generation partly to blame for this development, because the art form was never transferred to the younger generation in an effective way like it was done through apprenticeship during the days of his elders Lord Boxoe, Young Quick Silver and Mighty Reds. '*We selfish*' is what he said. '*We so busy with we own careers and making money and we never take the time of day to give back to the community*'.

Many youngsters have geared their attention towards more modern poetic genres such as rap and electronic dance music. The yearly Electric Festival hosted by the Aruban government and world-famous Dance Music DJ, DJ Chucky gets many young attendees locally and from abroad. All interest is not lost though as the late local music creator, Hildward *El Principe* Croes, has popularized a subgenre he has termed Soca Trance, a combination of Roadmarch-Calypso and Trance EDM which has created a considerable amount of interest amongst the youth. The elders are however not fond of this trend as they feel the tradition of Critical-Calypso is dying in favor of party music. The inscriptions for the Calypso Festival on average count, about 10 to 20 Critical-Calypso's compared to almost 100 Roadmarch-Calypso's. These numbers speak for themselves.



## Selling out or cashing in?

Mighty Talent's career was not without controversies. Just as he had many fans, he also had staunch critics and some downright enemies. He has been criticized by some, especially from *pariba* over the years based on their perception that he has 'sold out'. One interpretation of 'selling out' by Caroline Hamilton (2007, 45) is defined as 'moving away from the popularly unknown (avant-garde or the underground) towards the mainstream'.<sup>65</sup> In other words, that he was now fully engaged in what could be considered the mainstream Narratives of the One Happy Island, that he so skillfully opposed in the past. Some people saw it as him cashing in on his talent, while others saw it as the opposite. People have said, '*he turn he back on his hometown*' or '*he don't come up this side anymore*'. The fact that he now lives in a beautiful Mediterranean style two story house with a pool in an upper middle-class neighborhood in the *pabou* area hasn't gone down all that well with some. Some see it as a far cry from his humble beginnings in San Nicolas.

Furthermore, some of the statements I have picked up in San Nicolas, were also that '*he is one of the best ever, but he doesn't perform at shows and parties in San Nicolas anymore*'... '*his performance fees are too high*'... '*he only has white people in his video clips and at his parties*'... '*he sings mostly in Papiamentu and he doesn't defend the rights of Chocolate City anymore*'. Undoubtedly, such comments do not represent all opinions; or prohibit excitement and enthusiasm about this calypsonian. Sometimes, these same critics would be very gracious when

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<sup>65</sup> See Rupa Huq's chapter on selling out or resisting dominant discourses in *Beyond Subculture: Pop, Youth and Identity in a Postcolonial World* (2006).

he does perform in San Nicolas so there was some level of ambiguity. But even so, these opinions were very much part of the public discourse in San Nicolas.

Perhaps the biggest criticism, by some in the calypso world, some calypsonians, and some calypso elders, was that of his ‘pluri-lingual approach’ to calypso. When performing his calypsos, he mixes different languages, what linguist refer to as codeswitching (Muysken 1995); mostly between English and Papiamentu and sometimes Spanish and Dutch. Jackie, a newspaper columnist and calypso elder has referred to this style of calypso as *Arulypso*, short for Aruban-Calypso.<sup>66</sup> Another calypso elder said,<sup>67</sup>

*It is not, one hundred percent the real thing because English is the language of calypso not Papiamentu. That is the language of the people who brought calypso to Aruba. Those who don't know better, taking it over as well.*

The greatest criticism, on the language issue, has come from a fellow calypsonian and former bandmate by the name of Black Diamond. (In the next chapter, his approach will be detailed). Black Diamond, has expressed this opinion in various interviews, as well as in his songs. His main argument is that calypso should be sung in Creole English entirely, because this is the language that calypso is sung in the rest of the English Caribbean, and more importantly this is the language of the ‘cultural owners’ of the calypso art form. In Emanuelson’s (2015) documentary he said,

*...you shouldn't use different languages, because it is a bail out. When you can't find a word to rhyme in English, you switch it up with Papiament, because Papiament is strong phonetically, to make it work. I see it as limitation (of skill).*

In this same documentary another calypsonian, Mighty Whitey, said,

*Calypso should be sung in English ... many people might not agree with me but the reason I say this is if you sing in Papiamentu, how are people going to understand you internationally. You cannot go anywhere.*

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<sup>66</sup> Jacky Hubert, interviewed by the author, press office, February 2005, Aruba.

<sup>67</sup> Clifford Buckley, conversation with the author, Bonaire Bar, January 2015, Aruba.

As you can see, this creole society as described earlier was not entirely a utopian state of affairs so to speak. It was also filled with contradictions such as the kind of boundary-drawing seen in the examples above. Resistance towards calypso's creolization such as in this case was very real as its proponents wanted to maintain a specific way of functioning resembled the traditional African retentionist approach as described earlier in the works of Herskovits.

On the other side of the debate some have said, that it is actually because of the plurilingual approach he uses, is the reason why they are drawn to him. In this line, fellow up and coming calypsonian from *pabou*, King Jeon, said the following about Mighty Talent:

*Mighty Talent tawata e artista cu a trece e estilo di pariba y pabou hunto den un solo estilo, el a mix e Ingles y e Papiamento. Desde awo mi ta bay canta tur mi canticanan na Papiamento, pasobra esey ta mi idioma, pasobra e ingles cu ami a sina na scol, no ta e ingles cu nan kier tende. Mi ta respete si pasobra pariba e cultura a cuminsa.*  
(Emanuelson 2015)

[Mighty Talent was the artist who brought the style of *pariba* and *pabou* together into one distinct style, he combined the English language and the Papiamento language. From now on I will sing all my songs in Papiamento, because that is my language, because the English that I learned at school, isn't the English that they want to hear. I respect it though because *pariba* is where the culture began].

A casual fan expressed to me that it is actually because Mighty Talent [who] codeswitches, 'I can understand his songs...the other calypsonians, who sing in San Nicolas English alone, I have difficulty understanding'. Another calypsonian, former festival winner Mr Unique in a tv interview in 2013 said that 'Papiamento is our national language. We should be proud to use it. We don't have to copy Trinidad style, we have our own style'.<sup>68</sup> Mighty Reds, a calypso elder from *pariba*, doesn't seem to have a problem with singing in Papiamento either, he says

*It's all about the content of the song, yuh message have to be good, if it so, then I don't see no problem. Even Mighty Sparrow, sing a calypso in Dutch, Beautiful Dutch Girl. If Sparrow could make it sound good, I don't see no problem.* (Emanuelson 2015)

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<sup>68</sup> Post-performance interview on Tele Aruba, February 2017, Aruba.

About the language debate Mighty Talent says,

*It was actually Lord Boxoe, that I learned it from. He is the first one I heard sing calypso in English and Papiamento. I don't see the problem with it. Aruba is a country of different languages. I grew up speaking different languages. I sing for everybody. What people don't understand, is that I do it strategically, I just don't mix languages together. You have to know how and when to do it. Most of the youngsters imitating me, don't know that.*

A bit further in the text, Mighty Talent's pluri-lingual approach will be on display in the song text examples.

### Mighty Talent in song: Pre-90s

From my analyses in the way he engaged with some of the Narratives of the One Happy Island, we see Mighty Talent's calypso career going through numerous transitions, but can best be described as having two phases; namely a pre-90s and a post-90s phase. I will elaborate on these phases as we go along. In the pre-90s phase, Mighty Talent mostly took a classically Caribbean San Nicolas-Centric', African retentionist, Critical-Calypso position that echoed the rhythms and melodies of the forefathers of the art form in Aruba like King Paul, Lord Boxoe, Mighty Reds and Young Quick Silver. Creating his own style, he projected himself as a warrior and activist through the art of calypso for his home town of Chocolate City. He was a revolutionary that took on the plight of his people. He mostly sang in San Nicolas English, only using Papiamento and other languages on occasion. It was more to complement, but not to dominate the song. He was the 'voice' of his people in the fight against the 'fake' Narratives of the One Happy Island, projected by the dominant classes.

Despite some humoristic and 'smutty' [sexual] topics, his songs were mostly criticisms of politicians for their lack of attention given to San Nicolas. The first two verses of his calypsos were dedicated mostly to the plight of San Nicolas. He often focused on black identity issues.

Keeping in line with developments in U.S. politics and pop culture at the time, he took a page out of the Afrocentric black liberation theology of James Cone (1991) to celebrate the ‘black race’ as a superior race. He did not identify with the blond hair, blue eyed Jesus of Leonardo da Vinci. He equates the Black is Beautiful philosophy to Chocolate City *we-ness* in a transnational manner. In the end of his chorus, he even compares himself in a braggadocios way to great men of African descent as described in chapter two on the calypsonian. He positions himself as a god, pop icon, king, and great civil rights leader as Martin Luther King Jr. in his 1985 calypso entitled ‘Who is Who: Black Man’ as a strong signal to the Aruban society, to recognize the potency of his ‘race’:

### **Who is Who: Black Man 1985<sup>69</sup>**

*I have enough of proof to show you tonight,  
that God is Black, possibly White,  
every time they show a picture of di holy man,  
he ain't di same color as Ronald Reagan,  
well tonight I going present 3 names to you,  
and I am sure that you people will agree with me too,  
that these 3 black people they so damn famous,  
I am sure they got di same color as Jesus.*

(Chorus)

*Michael Jackson, he is black man,  
Jessie Jackson, he is a black man  
and the one that you want,  
is me Mighty Talent, he is black man.*

In his 1988, composition entitled ‘I Mad’, he had criticism for people from *pabou* who complained about having to work in San Nicolas because of the relatively long distance they had

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<sup>69</sup> Track # 6 verse 1 on YouTube channel

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjZkZyYy8Al\\_t4i0Ifkhk7Yg](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjZkZyYy8Al_t4i0Ifkhk7Yg)

to drive. Even though Aruba is the smallest island of the ABC Islands, driving from *pariba* to *pabou* and vice versa is considered to be long. On days with heavy traffic, it can take up to an hour. As already mentioned earlier, after the refinery closed in the mid 1980's the government invested in the tourism industry in the Palm Beach area. Many of the workers who worked in this area came from *pariba* because of their ability to speak English. Commuting to *pabou* was just a normal part of life. When the government established some government offices in San Nicolas however, some persons from *pabou* complained about having to travel to the other side of the island.

### **I MAD 1988<sup>70</sup>**

*Just last year I sing I love Aruba,  
and how we have to start helping each other,  
some people didn't know when I sing all that,  
includes all districts plus Oranjestad,  
When di government start making some changes,  
spreading all over they offices,  
some people start to act so ridiculous  
just because they have to work in San Nicolas.*

(Chorus)

*Maybe we houses breaking down,  
maybe we mainstreet like a ghost town,  
for those who complain let me remind you,  
San Nicolas is part of Aruba too.*

In his pre-90s phase, he also acts as a spokesman, a union leader for Aruban musicians who are exploited in the One Happy Island tourist industry. In this same Critical-Calypso 'I Mad' he addresses the issue of hotel owners paying foreign acts large sums of money while local

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<sup>70</sup> Track # 7 verse 1 on YouTube channel

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjZkZyYy8Al\\_t4i0Ifkhk7Yg](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjZkZyYy8Al_t4i0Ifkhk7Yg)

musicians are exploited and treated as second class citizens. He prides himself on his musical versatility.

*Well hotel owners, let me tell you this,<sup>71</sup>  
 you owners betta stop with this stupidity,  
 it's a shame, if I want to do a show,  
 I have to go some hotel all in Curaçao,  
 here you rather pay foreigners thousand dollars,  
 while paying we locals a few guilders,  
 well let me tell you this and forget never,  
 what they could do, we could do much betta  
 They sing disco, I could do that too,  
 they sing rock and roll, that easy to do,  
 I prove myself now I want to know?  
 if they could take this mic and sing calypso*

As a young man, Mighty Talent was an apprentice of his neighbor and friend calypso elder Lord Boxoe, who trained him in the art of verbal battle. What is called *picong* and often done in *extempo*, rhyming off the cuff. This is a very important skill in the traditional calypso culture; especially in Trinidad. Lord Boxoe taught him the skills necessary to take the stage against the big name calypsonians. Later, Lord Boxoe became his rival on the calypso music scene. In typical extempo fashion he then later challenged his master. Calypsonians from the 70s and 80s were said to be middle aged men with oil stained hands from the refinery. It was basically a big man's club. Youngsters had to prove their worthiness. Mighty Talent dared to challenge his teacher even telling him that he could not defeat him, not even with witchcraft. He finalizes 'I Mad' with this verse.

*Lord Boxoe, just before I go,<sup>72</sup>  
 there is one thing that you should know,  
 I respect and admire Boxoe's courage,*

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<sup>71</sup> Verse 3

<sup>72</sup> Verse 5

*for trying to beat me here on this stage,  
 Boxoe ma boy, you know you cyan win,  
 not even with obeah [witchcraft] from St Martin,  
 I think, you done know, you already lose,  
 I'd rather give my crown to Boysie Croes  
 (Chorus)*

*Boysie say mundo ta caba, [the world is coming to an end]  
 Boxoe listen all over,  
 Boxoe, that will be the day,  
 when you Boxoe take this crown away*

In typical Critical Calypso fashion, fighting for the rights of ‘his people’ in San Nicolas he was always skeptical of their intentions during the election period. He saw them as wolves in sheep’s clothing. *Pariba* carries a lot of weight during political elections, because whomever *pariba* votes for stands a good chance of winning. Politicians are fully aware of this and pull out all the stops. During election time, they are regulars at funerals, church services and parties. They stick to San Nicolas, ‘like bees to honey’. They all want to be seen as compassionate and loving leaders, persons who can be trusted. In his 1989 calypso entitled *Shut Up Your Mouth* he addressed the issue of populism and nepotism in Aruban politics.

### **Shut up your Mouth 1989<sup>73</sup>**

*A say, ahhh, ...shut up your mouth,  
 They say, Mighty Talent don't know one thing what he talking bout  
 Politicians my whole life I never see,  
 all of a sudden going on tv, saying they's the best,  
 vote for them and forget the rest,  
 they is my best friend when election here,  
 even send post card saying happy new year,  
 but when they done got my vote, is then they does disappear.  
 Now they walking round, in my hat and coat,  
 they all smiling cause they got my vote,  
 election done, now they better start,*

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<sup>73</sup> Track # 2 verse 2 on YouTube channel

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjZkZyYy8Al\\_t4iOIfkhk7Yg](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjZkZyYy8Al_t4iOIfkhk7Yg)



*fix up we mainstreet like Nassaustraat.* [the main shopping district of Oranjestad]

### Mighty Talent in song: Post-90s

What one sees in the Mighty Talent of the mid 90s, around 1994, is a shift from the Chocolate City *we-ness* theme in his calypsos to a more inclusive, Aruba theme. This new *we-ness* was not barrio bound anymore but rather nation bound. In his lyrics he used more Papiamentu, Dutch and Spanish and he made fewer references to San Nicolas. His anti-government lyrics became less vindictive and more humorous employing this style of calypso more actively. He began, using multiple languages strategically in his songs, what sociolinguist, call, ‘exaggerated codeswitching’ (Poplack 1980).

Mighty Talent indicated in our conversation that Venezuelan television was the only audiovisual broadcast medium available on Aruba in the 70s and 80s. Papiamentu and English were spoken at home and on the street and Dutch was spoken in schools. It was common practice for Arubans to switch from one language to another according to time and space. Aruban language and educational scientist Regine Croes (1995) shows that very linguistic variety had its corresponding culture and values which were learned as well. Many of the punch lines of his verses were in a strategically chosen language (Richardson & Richardson 2012b).

In his radio interviews during this period, I observed, he started to integrate multiple languages in his commentaries. A regular conversation with DJ Scorpio (Ruben Garcia), a renowned *locutor* [radio host] and one of Aruba’s beloved DJ’s, would normally go like this:

*Bon dia Scorpio con ta bay* [Good morning Scorpio], life is *druk* [busy] man, I’m just here in my studio, *preparando pa mi siguiente produccion* [preparing for my next production].

The English he uses in this context is a more standard variety than the San Nicolas Creole. Perhaps it was because more people on the island could understand it. It all depended on the point he wanted to make. The switching of languages was perhaps thus used as a means of getting more recognition from certain language groups in the population. Especially the usage of Papiamento in this context as Papiamento (alongside Dutch) is the national language on Aruba and also the lingua franca (Dijkhof and Pereira 2010). There is then a linguistic connection, that allows one to interconnect with the majority of the population on a more profound level, because one could identify with the language and thus the audience could also see themselves as part owner of the calypso genre.

In my observation, this went even further than many creole societies in the Caribbean and the diasporas. When for example Glissant, Hall, Gilroy, Nettleford and others theorize about creole societies they are still mostly speaking from a monolingual or at most bilingual reality. I would argue that when one is immersed in a society such as Aruba, where multiple languages and interpretations, not necessarily related (for example Dutch and Spanish or English, English Creole and Papiamento are continuously used in a *flow*, one's conceptualization of the lived experience of *creolization* and *border crossing* perhaps could be different. It was not only between English and English Creole like for example in Jamaica or French and French Creole like for example in Martinique, it entailed much more. Surinam's pluri-lingual society might come closest in the Caribbean basin.

Arubans are very much aware of codeswitching tactics and consciously employ a language politics where identities and power relations are negotiated based on the outcome of the interaction. This to either make a good impression on the person with whom they are interacting, or maybe to do the exact opposite to prove a specific point. For example, insisting on speaking

Papiamento in the presence of a Dutch language speaker to prove that the Dutch person living on the island ought to integrate and learn the native language (Richardson & Richardson 2012b).

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As a reflexive note, I need to mention it is not really clear what changes Mighty Talent personally went through during the mid-90s. I did not capture this in our conversations, but as far as his career goes, we see that in 1994 he scored a massive hit entitled '*Saca e Boem*' [pushout your buttocks]. This album went gold in Curaçao and arguably helped him become a mega pop star throughout the Dutch Caribbean, Surinam and within the Dutch Caribbean Diaspora in the Netherlands. It was also the '*Saca e Boem*' album that made him largely financially independent as an artist. Mighty Talent told me that, that song was such a huge hit in Curaçao that they prohibited the song from being played during their carnival parade because it had become more popular than many of the local compositions. As for his reasons, perhaps it was a self-realization as an artist that he represented much more than only San Nicolas. He was not only a national star, but he had become an international figure. As a popular artist and calypsonian, he'd become the spokesperson of an entire nation, and had to represent all his fans from both *pariba* and *pabou*, as well as, those abroad.

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His critics from San Nicolas did not take too kindly to his new style of music. They started to question his commitment to their cause and fighting on their behalf. In 1995 flashes of a

'we/they' philosophy started to surface during the children's Calypso Festival when a young talented female singer who was not from San Nicolas, won the Calypso Festival multiple times. Mighty Talent was her coach and mentor and her songs were in large part in Papiamentu. One time she won the competition, she was roundly booed by the audience young and old alike, and she was left in tears. The headline in the Jan 31, 2015 *Bon Dia* newspaper read '*No tin palabra pa expresa daño haci na Lady X*' [there are no words to express the damage done to Lady X]. According to accounts, she was so traumatized that she never performed in such a competition again. Mighty Talent and other people in the community were furious and came to her defense in the media. Callers were angry because they couldn't understand how it was possible that grown folks, including teachers and other professionals could stoop so low to boo a little girl because they did not agree with the decision by the judges. Some say that the fans showed their disapproval, not specifically towards her, but as a symbol, and a protégé of Mighty Talent.

Going back to his calypsos, we that he started to address island wide themes. In his 1998 calypso 'Life in Aruba' he addressed issues concerning the livability of Aruba as a result of globalization. He voices concern that the influence of media, ill-intentioned foreigners, materialism, and selfishness has changed the mentality of his people. He longs for an Aruba where locals could sleep with their doors wide open and where neighbors would greet and look out for one another. The foreigners who were here, were also welcome as long as they took on the 'help thy neighbor philosophy'. His refrain had a deliberate patriotic tinge. He quoted the words of local political hero, Betico Croes, the architect of the *Status Aparte* which established the autonomy of Aruba from the Netherlands Antilles in 1986. Some would consider Betico to be

the founding father of the nation, much in the fashion of Simon Bolivar in Latin America. Parts of the song is sung in Papiamentu and it has a unifying message.

### **Life in Aruba 1998<sup>74</sup>**

I am Aruba, I am *orguloso*, [I am Aruban, I am proud]  
 I going to *lucha lucha pa henter mi pueblo*, [I am going to fight for my people]  
*anto si mi cay na caminda*, [if I should fall by the way side]  
*coy e bandera, y zwaai e, zwaai e*, [take the flag and wave it]  
*hisa bo bandera, hisa bo cultura*, [lift your flag, lift your culture]  
*yuda bo prohimo*, yes even *stranhero*, [help your brothers, even foreigners]  
 common help everybody, not just your friends and *compinchi*, [partners]  
*hisa nos na layra*, [lift us in the sky]  
 like you using plenty Viagra

In his 2001 winning calypso, ‘Wait one Minute’, he talks on behalf of Aruban women, who have complained to him about Latina women taking their men. The, *we/they* philosophy, has gone from *pariba* versus *pabou*, now to ‘Aruba’ versus ill-intentioned ‘foreigners’. He makes a plea for immigrants to learn Papiamentu. They complain that these so-called voluptuous *mamitas*, will do anything to marry these men, and get a Dutch passport. Mighty Talent does his own research, and asks these *mamitas*, what do they have that is so special. To which they reply, they are exiting and try different sexual positions. Again, you see Mighty Talent's pluri-lingual approach of using San Nicolas English, Papiamentu and Spanish to describe the scene. Everyone is able to understand him and this topic is a popular issue, taking the defense of the rights of Aruban women, gives him support from a large part of the crowd.

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<sup>74</sup> Track # 8 verse (last) on YouTube channel  
[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRJzKzZyYy8Al\\_t4iOIfkhk7Yg](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRJzKzZyYy8Al_t4iOIfkhk7Yg)

### Wait One Minute 2001<sup>75</sup>

I read Bon Dia, I read the Diario,  
 Someone woman, always writing *remetido*, [opinion column]  
 Telling you, *muhernan*, you betta *cuida bo casa* [women take care of your husband]  
 Before he leave you, for a Spanish *Mamita*  
 I ask *Mamita*, *oye*, what have you got,  
 That Aruban, woman have not  
 She say *oye, papito, ya sabe tu* [hey daddy, you already know]  
 We do things Aruban women would never do  
 Homber, *kier* love, *amor* in a different style [Men, want...]  
*Muher rubiano* say No, one time! [Aruban women say...]  
 But if he ask she, *mamita*, she say *si si*  
 She talking bout sixty nine  
 But wait, my Aruban woman is great  
 She respect, her body and mind  
 She will cook, clean and love you blind  
 But she ain't giving you no (from) behind

Mighty Talent's identity as a performer went from a notion that was narrowly defined to a construct that was more inclusive in nature.

Mighty Talent's strained relationship with his critics from *pariba*, hit another pinnacle in 2006, after it was announced he had won the Calypso Festival over another crowd favorite, T-Money. He was pelted with bottles and rocks by some in the audience. Most of them were supporters from another band, who were of the opinion their candidate was the rightful winner. The *Solo di Pueblo* newspaper headline on February 6th, 2006, read: '*Roadmarch a caba na wrestling...a yobe stage cu cups, botter, ijs etc*' [Roadmarch ended in wrestling...the stage was showered with cups, bottles, ice etc]. His opponents accused him of recycling old songs disguised in a new format. There was also finger-pointing in the direction of the judges, because according to them they did not have 'true' knowledge of 'real' calypso culture. 'The judges were

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<sup>75</sup> Track # 9 verse 4 on YouTube channel

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjZkZyYy8Al\\_t4iOlfkhk7Yg](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjZkZyYy8Al_t4iOlfkhk7Yg)

all from *pabou and white*' some of the critics said. It was the major topic of discussion on all the carnival radio programs, with supporter's arguments from different sides of the debate presenting their point of view in sometimes heated discussions.

When I asked Mighty Talent about the incident, he told me that this particular incident had a profound impact on him as 'this is the last calypso title my mother saw me win'. She died shortly thereafter. This event amongst other reasons, prompted him to retire for a few years. He cited 'lack of motivation', as he has won everything there is to be won. He told me that it 'hurt him' a lot but he forgives his detractors because he really thinks that they did not mean it. '*Circumstances does dictate how people react in a crowd*', he said. '*Even up to this day people still come up to me and apologize for what happened, I am not that type of person to hold a grudge*'. He said some calypsonians with their 'we' against 'them' thinking has created much division in the community. Even though, he did not mention it, I had a feeling he meant fellow Critical-Calypsonian Black Diamond, but ...I could only assume, but I was too embarrassed to ask. I thought it would be impolite. He went on further to say that, '*it's one little Island, when the competition is over we all have to continue living together. It doesn't make any sense*'.

After a hiatus of few years, he was still compelled to come back. In a radio interview on the Ivo 4 Life carnival radio program he cited, he missed the element of competition and that he wanted to teach the youngsters how 'true' calypso has to be done. Furthermore, he said that the fans missed him, and he wanted to please his fans.

In his 2009 calypso entitled *Situacion na Aruba, Perempempem*, he talked about the economic difficulties Aruba was facing as a result of the international economic crisis.

*Perempempem*, is a local Papiamentu saying for 'things are tight economically'. In a typical

Anansi style he proposes a solution for the high cost of utilities. Here, even more Papiamentu is used:

***Situacion na Aruba 2009***<sup>76</sup>

Cost a living, Lord it raising,  
 going high like skyrocket,  
*cos ta frega, placa ain't yega*, [things are tight, money isn't reaching]  
*ora bo bay supermarket, when* [you go at the supermarket]  
*Gobierno* tell me [government]  
*awa y coriente, conscientemente* [water and electricity, should be used consciously]  
*baha mi consumo*, [lower consumption]  
 I got a plan, *presente na bo*, [I'll present it to you]  
*spaar cu talent y biba miho*, [Save with Talent, and live better]  
 look *tur siman, bay lama*, [go to the beach every week]  
*sambuya by di ship what zink*, [take a dip by the sunken ship]  
*e mesun seawater, herbe den weya*, [the same seawater, should be boiled]  
*pa laba paña*, even to drink, [to wash clothes]  
 forget about using airco, *basha alcolado* and then you blow, [pour alcolado]  
*toiletpapier* baby tha di past, [toilet paper is in the past]  
*cabi lesa corant* then you wipe your *assina* [when you finish reading the paper then you can wipe your ass...]

Here, Mighty Talent breaks down the barriers between the four main languages spoken on Aruba even more clearly and aggressively codeswitches back and forth seemingly as an indication that he wants to appeal to all groups on the island. His philosophy seems very pragmatic; perhaps he realizes that ‘*we thing*’ is actually a ‘feel good thing’. It doesn’t include any special allegiance to a specific group above another. ‘If more people feel included, more people feel good, and if more people feel good, more people are happy and happy people spend more money on CD’s and drinks at the bar’. In the media, he casts himself as a happy go lucky Aruban artist who loves

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<sup>76</sup> Track # 10 verse 1 on YouTube channel

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjZkZyYy8Al\\_t4i0Ifkhk7Yg](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjZkZyYy8Al_t4i0Ifkhk7Yg)



all of his fans, and his words are very carefully chosen. You would not hear him saying, ‘*Chocolate City I love you*’ or something of that nature. He'd rather say ‘Aruba I love you’.

In his 2011 calypso, *Image*, he turns the mirror on the entire population in a call for everyone to take up their responsibility in helping Aruba as a real One Happy Nation instead of a fake version. The outfit he wore on stage represented an inclusive look. It was shiny and adorned with colors of the Aruban flag displaying a high sense of patriotism. The light blue symbolizing the beautiful Caribbean Sea that surrounds Aruba, the red that represents the blood that the Caiquetios (Arawak) Amerindians shed against the European colonizers and yellow indicating the prosperity of the aloe, oil and tourism industries that brought thousands to Aruban shores in search for a better future. Kids are taught the symbols of the flag at a very early age and the *himno di Aruba*, the national anthem.

Mighty Talent perhaps knows that by displaying these symbols of Aruban identification on his attire and by using bits and pieces of the *himno di Aruba* he would evoke national sentiment. To wear dashiki or gowns with African prints would alienate various groups on the island. He skillfully addresses the political polarization on the island, by talking about the two largest political parties, MEP and AVP, and their affiliated radio stations. He puts the gauntlet right down the middle, without taking sides.

**Image: *Ami, Abo, E* 2011<sup>77</sup>**

Minister Otimari, he throw a party  
 Introducing he new idea,  
 It was the ‘*Imagen Nobo, Aruba Nobo*’,[new image]  
 With fireworks, music and fanfare

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<sup>77</sup> Track # 11 verse 1 on YouTube channel  
[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjZkZyYy8Al\\_t4iOlfkhk7Yg](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjZkZyYy8Al_t4iOlfkhk7Yg)

Oti, use photos and colors,  
 even stick it with others, like a poster from Benetton  
 but the photo illustration, Gario ask the question  
 where the black representation?  
 photos and colors that ain't we fight,  
 we have to fight, to keep Aruba unite  
 But that *imagen*, papa, we will never see  
 If we don't change the Aruban mentality  
*Ken su cara, ta forma imagen Aruba*, [who's face forms the image of Aruba]  
*Ami Abo e* [me, you, him/her]  
 And who have to fight to live and to work with each other  
*Ami Abo e*  
*Aruba politiek*, so damn *verziekt*, [Aruban politics, sick- spoiled]  
 You hear them on the radio,  
 Who vote AVP, call Stanley on *nobenta* (90) them (Canal 90)  
 Who vote MEP, call Elvis on Top FM

## Conclusion

We have seen how Mighty Talent, has employed several approaches to engaging with some of the Narratives of the One Happy Island. The late-80s through mid-90s San Nicolas-centric approach, which is a Critical-Calypso that is more direct as opposed to a post 90s Aruba-centric approach which is a Critical-Calypso that uses the *mele*, gossipy storyteller approach. Both were different styles, powerful in their own right and yet unsettled many of the Narratives of the One Happy Island, in great degrees and provided the audience with much *plaisir*. One being more confrontational, and the other *mele-esque*, in which he humoristically tries to checkmate or trick some of the dynamics of symbolization through anansiistic border crossing.

One could argue that it is Mighty Talent, who is in great part responsible for taking calypso music in Aruba from being, '*we music*' as in San Nicolas Chocolate City music, to '*nos musica*', in which large part of the island could identify with and claim as their own. This is

mainly because of his ‘pluri-lingual all inclusive’ approach, with the usage of Papiamentu, where the majority of the island could also understand the latest *mele*’s.

We have also seen that some calypso elders and other critics in the calypso world, have argued that in his ‘opening of the market’, he has desecrated the ‘sacredness’ of the art form. They contend that for financial gain he has sold the art-form to the masses, commercialized it, and that which has been handed down over generations to those who were ‘worthy’, people who have dedicated themselves to understanding the language and culture, has in this process been depreciated. The elders believe in the ancient wisdoms that the calypso art form possesses through the use of ‘Chocolate City hieroglyphs’ so to speak. Such ancient wisdoms could only be acquired by a life of dedication to the art form until the elders felt that it was time and in his case with Lord Boxoe.

To a certain extent, Gluckman’s, structural functionalist stance on gossip is best applied to the position of the Mighty Talent and his Critical-*Mele*-Calypso with regards to the Narratives of the One Happy Island. In the tradition of the art-form as passed down by the calypso elders in Aruba, the main aim of the Critical-Calypsonian was to critically engage with dominant narratives of society, and at the same time not destroy his people. It was a balancing act. This of course put Mighty Talent in a difficult position, because he had to get the message out, complying with his role as interlocutor, yet not ostracize his community, both *pariba* and himself, and later *pabou*, in the process.

The Mighty Talent and other Critical-*Mele*-Calypsonians also had rules of conduct when rendering a song. If they did not adhere to the rules, the calypsonian could be ostracized by the entire calypso community, as the examples of Mighty Ringo and Smoking Joe have shown. It

was left up to the audience in the public sphere, to decipher the coded speech as the audience was also a very important participant in the process.

Paine's view of gossip also holds true to a certain degree to Mighty Talent's Critical-*Mele*-Calypso, but we see it directly being repressed, when its negativity starts to rear its head. Gluckman's structural functionalist stance as Critical-*Mele*-calypso primarily had a control function as in the Narratives of the One Happy Island. The rules were pretty simple as 'the public secret'. No names could be mentioned and the insinuations had to be packaged in such a way that left an air of mystery. This was to protect the calypsonian, as well as, the alleged culprits in the song. The calypsonian needed not to promote hate.

Much like what Niko Besnier has described on gossip, Critical-*Mele*-Calypso had a direct correlation between language, style and criticism of the dominant discourse of the elite or in this case the some of the Narratives of the One Happy Island. One of the key factors in this was the usage of wordplay. The usage of *mele*, humor, *double entendre*, voice variations, inflection and accentuation functioned to lessen the blow, all the while, bringing truth to light. These skills functioned to protect the calypsonian. In his defense Mighty Talent could say, 'I did not say that', or 'it wasn't me'. After the contest he had to return to his community, so he could not burn bridges or he would have become a social outsider and possibly been withheld from pursuing entertainment as his livelihood. The Critical-Calypsonian is pragmatic at best, and for this reason is still restrained by the dynamics of symbolization. So, as you can see, the *mele* approach, had its strengths and limitations.

This brings us to the major argument of this chapter, which is why Mighty Talent's Critical-*Mele*-Calypso does indeed deconstruct most of the Narratives of the One Happy Island producing some level of *plaisir*, but not so much *jouissance*, no matter how neatly packaged it is.

With regards to Critical-*Mele*-Calypso and Caribbean worldmaking, as described earlier, I see Mighty Talent's Critical-*Mele*-Calypso as going the furthest in challenging the Narratives of the One Happy Island, by means of trickery, which was Anansi's main magical skill as a deity. This form of Critical-Calypso, like Anansi, used double and multiple voicing to communicate and identify with its subjects. This was great because it quelled the majority of the tensions in the Caribbean region as a sometimes fragile *mélange* of diverse bits and pieces, meshed together to form the potential of a creolized whole. This was positive in my eyes, because it still went the furthest in avoiding ethnic and religious tensions seen in various parts of the world, and created a harmony in society, all the while acknowledging its imperfections. However, the only reason why it did not completely make the many Narratives of the One Happy Island irrelevant, was the fact that Mighty Talent, as Anansi, still relied on wordplay, trickery and illusion to keep the proclaimed mosaic together. Ironically, it was still a reactionary response to some form of oppression as someone somewhere had to be tricked.

Furthermore, the creole language politics that were being played with Critical-Calypso became part of the Narratives of the One Happy Island with all its symbolic codes and connotations. After a while everyone caught on to it. Instead of deconstructing the Narratives of the One Happy Island, in essence, the Critical-Calypsonians inadvertently propagated this theme, leaving everything neatly intact as it was fitting perfectly in line with the 'licensed affair'. The dominant classes wouldn't be affected negatively. The festival would be marketed so as many people as possible, could come and pay to witness the event. The 'voice of the people' eventually also became 'the voice of the dominant classes' and thus, was also part of the Narratives of the One Happy Island. The dominant classes would actually, encourage the calypsonian to continue

doing what they did, laugh along with them, even ask Mighty Talent to sing about them, because in the end they knew it was just for play, for a period and they were the ones pulling the strings.

## Chapter 6

### A Portrayal of Black Diamond:

#### The *Bad John* Calypso Warrior and the Narratives of the One Happy Island

*In di past when we had we lil contest  
di 'town man' never contributed,  
but now it worth ten thousand a guilders,  
its too much for di 'black man' to have it  
discrimination ain't done,  
they still killing di black man*  
**Black Diamond**

#### The *Mele* on Black Diamond

Almost everyone I spoke to on the island, both calypso fans and not, told me, 'if you want to speak to an outspoken calypsonian, you need to speak to the ultra-talented and ultra-controversial calypso warrior who goes by the stage-name of Black Diamond'. He is considered to be one of the most critical voices on the island, both in and out of the calypso world.

I knew of his work for some time, but I did not know him personally. My memory of him was that of his Critical-Calypso performances in the early 2000s. I remember being quite impressed with his calypso style, as his approach spoke to me on a personal level. I thought,

‘finally someone is talking about the imperfections of the One Happy Island in Aruba in a direct way; separate from all that traditional *mele*-style, wordplay calypso that we are accustomed to’. His ‘just plain ol’ straight talk’ approach was refreshing. If there was a face of ‘Chocolate City’, I was sure, ‘it had to be him’.

The opinions of him in Aruba vary. Some have said he’s musically gifted, loving, compassionate, a role model and a straight talker as, he is the only one standing up for San Nicolas, while others have said, he is an attention seeker, unreliable, unorganized, hungry for money and a jealous hothead. Some have even said, ‘*e guy aki ta problematico*’ [this guy is problematic], ‘*e kier dividi nos isla*’ [he wants to divide the country], ‘*e tin un compleho*’ [he has an inferiority complex]. In most of the conversations about him, he is inevitably compared to his contemporary, Mighty Talent. Mighty Talent is here often perceived as the more loved, talented and refined Critical-Calypsonian versus Black Diamond, the more criticized, anti-establishment, straight-talking Critical-Calypsonian. Elders in the calypso world and others would admit that he was one of the finest composers of his generation but that he was also a *bad john*, had a bad attitude and was a sore loser. One thing is sure, he has made his mark on the Aruban calypso scene.

We need to take a closer look at this calypsonian, the man behind the *sobriquet* to find out who he really is, to become acquainted with his personal philosophy, and to come to terms with what makes him so controversial, what has made him such a controversial figure of the Aruban calypso world. More importantly, a study of his life and work allows for a better understanding of the tensions underlying the many Narratives of the One Happy Island.

In this chapter, as in the previous one, I continue to argue that despite scholarly interest in the socially conscious side of Critical-Calypso, this sub-genre has its limitations with regard to



effectively making the Narratives of the One Happy Island in Aruba irrelevant. This chapter uses song text analysis and ethnographic accounts to trace how Black Diamond and his approach to calypso changed over the course of his career. I will argue that while he starts his career with a very eclectic, creole-like, and pluri-lingual, he gradually becomes more monolingual, essentialist and African retentionist. I contend, however, that this trajectory is neither monocausal nor monodirectional.

### Black Diamond in Person

Black Diamond's career spans over 30 years, starting out in his early teens with a young neighborhood band called, 'Boys Next Door'. According to Jackie, the newspaper columnist and longtime Calypso Festival MC, this was a band of young 'Chocolate City boys', whom in the late 80s were known for their legendary hit Theolinda, which was composed by Black Diamond and school friend Francio Guadeloupe and other members of the band. It was sung by Mighty Rusty. Most of Black Diamond's Roadmarch-Calypsos were sung by other people. Some would say that more vocally talented artists could better convey his deepest sentiments, besides, his vocal abilities were not as developed at the time. Early in Black Diamond's career, his muse was The Mighty Rusty; a neighborhood friend who possessed 'magnificent vocal cords' as many in the community claimed. Later in his career Black Diamond gave his blessings to a youngster from The Village in San Nicolas, whom he took under his wing at a very early age named T-Money. T-Money's unique 'calypso yodel', as coined by a good friend of mine, set him apart from his musical counterparts. T-Money was the Aruban version of the Mighty Shadow from Trinidad and Tobago. His story is told in the next chapter.

Black Diamond has composed over 130 songs throughout his career with the majority of them performed by other artists, and the rest sung by himself. He has been a leading figure of many different bands such as Boys Next Door, Eclipse, Taxx to the Max and Le Groove. Interestingly enough, none of his compositions were ever selected for the official Roadmarch-Calypso title bestowed by SAC. In 2003, he won his only Critical-Calypso title with a song titled, 'Discrimination'. Ironically, that same year Mighty Talent did not sing.

Despite this lack of success in the Calypso Festival, his compositions have become some of the most popular songs to be played on the streets and the airwaves of Aruba. He has won 14 'Roadjam' titles, a title similar to the Trinidadian Roadmarch title, which is an award given by radio stations for the most popular composition of the carnival season. In Aruba, this is an honorific title since they are not awarded by the carnival organizing committee (SAC).

### The Encounter

In 2004, on my first fieldtrip on Aruba, in my capacity as a university student, I found it important to meet the man that so many people had been talking about. After I inquired a bit, I got his contact information and made an appointment to meet him. We met at a local restaurant he owned called Freddie's. He had inherited this place in San Nicolas from his deceased father. His father, known as Pops, was a well-known small businessman in San Nicolas. At the time, Black Diamond struck me as a short and firmly built man in his early to mid-forties with a shiny Colombian coffee-colored complexion. His head was cleanly shaven and his eyes carried an intense, and deep-thinking look. What stood out the most during our first encounter (and there would be many after that) was his clearly delineated philosophy of the calypso art form. He

knew what he was talking about. He never completed high school, or had formal music training as others have, but seemed to have it figured out. He was outspoken and knew exactly the message he wanted to convey. He deployed a sort of a perfect mixture of complex academic and philosophical concepts, a deep knowledge of black empowerment philosophy, mixed with local sayings and ‘sailor man language’.<sup>78</sup> This street flavor and intellectual capacity made what he said seem more real to me. He was the epitome of the calypsonian as a *bad boy* and *sagaboy*. I was fascinated. Black Diamond was what I considered to be an organic intellectual for all the reasons above. He was a *homber di pueblo* [man of the people]. He was a self-proclaimed autodidact with little traditional schooling who taught himself to be musician, cook, graphic designer, painter, politician and activist. He was a man with conviction and did not hold anything back. Calypso meant everything to him. He said,

*Calypso comes from deep sorrows, sometimes, comes from deep pain, comes from arid situations, yuh know, calypso is fire. Calypso is what you feel when you want to bring a message to a community and you don't see it possible through the regular channels and you decide, well, if you can't do it through the regular channels, this is the stage that you have.*

He went on to discuss the main problem with calypso culture in Aruba, according to him. His outlook about the future was grim.

*Calypso music in Aruba is almost dead. They ain't have a clue what calypso music is about. They does put a set of judges from town, who don't know nothing about calypso music. Not because you could play a merengue or a salsa mean that you know what calypso is about. You should have the feeling. The only way you can have this feeling is if you from up here. You have to know the language. You have to grow up with it from small. When we would have parties when we small, calypso and soca music does be playing. The children does learn the dances, eat the food and drink the drinks. The children grow up around it and can feel it. Is in we blood*

Quickly after the first few moments with him, it was clear to me that for him, there were definite boundaries and classifications in Aruba, you had people from *pariba* and people from *pabou*,

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<sup>78</sup> Colloquial expression for ‘bad words’.

you had ‘black’ and ‘white’ and you had ‘*we music*’ and ‘*they music*’. There was no creolized version of Caribbean society. He clearly took a position akin to what has been earlier described as the plantation model of a society which was segregated and suppressed by the local white elite. He felt, as a first-generation Aruban, that his parents, who came from Curaçao and St Kitts during the oil boom in the earlier half of the twentieth century, brought ‘their’ calypso and ‘their’ carnival tradition to Aruba. To him, they were the founding fathers of the art form on the island, thus, they should be the owners of calypso culture. He clearly saw *pabou* as being a creation of the capitalist class, in essence similar to some versions of the Narratives of the One Happy Island, with little feeling for or understanding of calypso culture. He said that it ‘was all about money and power’ for them. SAC, the carnival organizing committee, was a symbol of this greed and also the main target of his criticism. SAC was filled with ‘*Rubianos*’ or what Vera Green (1969) calls ‘Native Arubans’, locally classified as white Arubans, whom Black Diamond claimed were in bed with the elite families and the big business class from Oranjestad. They called all the shots on the island and represented the top of the social pyramid.

Black Diamond attributed his hard line stance and his emotional, no nonsense attitude to his upbringing. He spent parts of his childhood in *Casa Cuna* and *Imelda Hof*, both foster homes. From the age of sixteen, he was on his own. He had to fend for himself because there was no one there for him. He felt abandoned and not accepted. As he told me, he was involved in many fights and was somewhat of a rebel and even went to prison a few times. However, he had a strong sense of responsibility and loyalty. About this he said:

*I can't take injustice. If I see something wrong I have to say something. I will say it and that's it. Who don't like it, that's their problem. If I have to apologize after then I will do it. That's me. Take it or leave it. No one was there for me so I had to look after myself. Many times, we didn't have water, electricity we had to borrow water from the neighbor to bathe. Sometimes we had it so bad that we had to eat bread and bread. That's why I develop many different skills. I used to make my own clothes to go to school, full of style.*

*I used to sell pastechies [patties] and food in school too. I become a multitasker. I become a hustler. My mind always thinking on the next plan. Sometimes I can't even sleep because my brain working. That's why when I write my songs, they just come out because I am always thinking. I am connected to higher powers, to the universe. That's the way I get my inspiration. That's the way I grow up. A lot of people judging me but they don't know my background.*

Throughout his career, from the 1980s to the 2000s there has been a definite shift in his calypso style. My observations of his work over the years indicates that, in contrast to Mighty Talent, who started with a San Nicolas-centric-African retentionist approach and then became ‘*nos artista*’ [our artist], Black Diamond started as very eclectic in his approach, and was open to calypso being sung in multiple languages. His, so to speak, ‘radicalization process’ took place during the 90s and the conversion came fairly quickly.

### The 80s

Interestingly enough, Black Diamond’s biggest Roadmarch-Calypso hit in the 80s was a plurilingual song composed in English, Papiamentu and Dutch. This was not in line with his essentialist calypso philosophy of San Nicolas English as a symbolic marker of Chocolate City *we-ness*. It wasn’t ‘pure’ as he would say. There were no traces of ‘we’ versus ‘them’, or ‘English’ versus ‘Papiamentu’ rhetoric at this stage in his career. This song, as said earlier was interpreted by Mighty Rusty, and was related to a story of a man meeting a voluptuous lady named Theolinda. He asks her to dance but she soon realizes that the *wining* dance he wanted to engage in was too sexy for her. *Wining* is the rotating or gyrating of the pelvis in a circular motion (Devonish 2011), usually accompanied by faster Roadmarch-Calypso tunes. The dance movement is focused below the waist. One can do it individually or with a partner. Theolinda, somewhat conservative, gets scared and realizes that she wants to get away as she fears her

partner will find out about her *wining* with another man. She pleads in all languages for him to let her go.

### **Theolinda 1987<sup>79</sup>**

*When I met up with Theolinda,  
She had a body that drive me crazy,  
she even ask me to jam with this Roadmarch,  
Theolinda, on the floor, hear her mister no no,  
Chorus  
mister no no, don't jam me so.  
meneer nee nee, ik wil niet meer,  
mister no no, no yanga mi asina mas<sup>80</sup>*

### The 90s

I got the impression that it wasn't until the mid-nineties that Black Diamond started being critical of the direction in which calypso music was heading. He was opposed to the faster Calypso-Roadmarch rhythms slowly being introduced by singers like Mighty Talent and his group OREO. He felt that this tendency did not conform sufficiently to the Trinidadian classic calypso canon of the likes of Lord Kitchener, The Mighty Duke, Winston So So, Super Blue and so on. Black Diamond pleaded for slower rhythms and groovier melodies accompanied by a heavy bass and a bluesy saxophone, all of which are typically found in Trinidadian 70s, 80s soca music.

Soca is a music genre that was introduced, amongst others, by Trinidadian artist Lord Shorty, later Lord Shorty I, in the 1970s in an attempt to create a music that represented all cultures in Trinidad (Mason 1998, 29). Soca, in the Aruban context, as described in the opening chapters, is considered to be a specific style of Roadmarch-Calypso that never reached the

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<sup>79</sup> Track # 12 verse 1 on YouTube channel

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjzKzZyYy8Al\\_t4iOlfkhk7Yg](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjzKzZyYy8Al_t4iOlfkhk7Yg)

<sup>80</sup> The three last sentences of the chorus have the same meaning.

popularity that it attained in Trinidad, Barbados and other places in the Anglophone Caribbean (Razak 1997, 129-130). This is perhaps because soca became the symbol of Afro Caribbean, *ingles* Aruban identity. By then Arubans were already accustomed to a more creolized version of Critical-Calypso and Roadmarch-Calypso, known in Aruba as *musica di carnaval* with more Spanish Caribbean music influences from the Dominican Republic, Venezuela and Colombia (Razak 1997, 127). Calypso singer, King Jeon in Emanuelson's (2015) documentary talked about the difference between musicians from *pariba* and musicians from *pabou*, specifically about Black Diamond's style. He said

*Bandanan di pabou, ta custumbra di toca musica live, merengue, salsa, bachata, ritmo combina, durante aña, y ora na toca un Roadmarch, bo por tende e slag, e style ey den e muziek. ...Ora un banda di pariba toca, nan ta custumbra di toca cu machine, ...mi ta reconose estilo di soca ey, e estilo di Gario'.*

[Musical bands of *pabou* are accustomed of playing live music, merengue, salsa, bachata, *ritmo combina* during the year, and when they play a Roadmarch, you can hear the beat, that kind of style in the music ... When a musical band from *pariba* plays, they are accustomed of playing with machines ... I recognize that style of soca, the style of Gario]

In the early 1990s, Black Diamond composed a song called 'Roots' that articulates his Trinidad-centric philosophy, using *double entendre* to critique recent developments in Aruban calypso culture. He directed his criticism towards Mighty Talent and his band OREO, the biggest and most popular band at the time. He compared it, referring to Mighty Talent, to a 'brown on the outside-white on the inside' Oreo cookie.<sup>81</sup> He specifically criticized them for introducing hyper-fast, electronic beats which in turn, induced hyper-fast, exhaustive dance moves which in some circles is called 'the horse race'. Black Diamond was promoting a sort of 'calypso renaissance' where 'old timers'. mainly the *ingles*, could enjoy 'their' music. The dance that

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<sup>81</sup> *Bounty* is here also used as a synonym.

would accompany their style of Roadmarch-Calypso would be the chipping dance. Chipping is a forward dance motion where one makes half steps to the musical rhythm. It's an easygoing dance that is supposed to stimulate all the bodily senses in a gradual way.

### **Roots (1993)<sup>82</sup>**

*I think it's a biscuit,  
 who cause all this mess,  
 spoil up Calypso and Roadmarch and now Aruba got stress.  
 A big disappointment, for all those who know,  
 the right speed for Roadmarch and how it should go,  
 I think that this time,  
 to stop all the blasted mess,  
 I think that this time we going clean up the blasted mess  
 (chorus),  
 slow down di tempo, carnival,  
 slow down di tempo, bacchanal,  
 slow down di tempo, when I realize,  
 this ain't no exercise, aerobics instructors,  
 body abusers, soca destroyers,  
 heey back to the roots*

During the 1990s Black Diamond's 'Back to the Roots' calypso renaissance gained a considerable following, especially among people from *pariba* who felt that carnival and calypso was 'we thing'. His music produced a feeling of nostalgia according to revelers who joined his band. The followers of this movement required that all calypso songs be sung in San Nicolas English, the songs have a meaningful topic, and a rhythm and melody that resembles Trinidadian-style calypso and soca. Black Diamond got the approval of many calypso elders because they shared the same sentiment. In the 'Back to Roots' movement there was no space for what he called 'commando music', where popular Roadmarch-Calypso artists instruct their

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<sup>82</sup> Track # 13 verse 1 on YouTube channel

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjZkZyYy8Al\\_t4i0Ifkhk7Yg](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjZkZyYy8Al_t4i0Ifkhk7Yg)



listeners to ‘jump with their towels’, ‘go to the left’, ‘slide and duck’ or ‘*waye*’ [wave it]. They were labeled ‘soca destroyers’. Black Diamond’s movement entailed a slower, groovier rhythm where revelers could ‘chip and wine their waist’ as they say, at their own pace.

### Early 2000s

In the early 2000s, after trying his hand at politics as a candidate who advocated more governmental attention for the area of San Nicolas, he soon came to realize that, in his words ‘*San Nicolas people is a tough crowd to mobilize*’. His criticism shifted somewhat from the government to the people, saying that ‘the government was trying to do something for San Nicolas, but the people themselves had to do their part as well’:

*People from up here sometimes like crabs in a bucket. Anytime they see somebody moving up and thing, they want to bring them back down with the rest of them. I can't deal with that. You paint a building today, to make the place look nice and clean, the other day somebody going come and fuck it up. That ain't right. No wonder places like Santa Cruz and town and thing can progress with leaps at a time and we staying in the back. People from up here can't even organize a picnic together without some bullshit happening. Somebody going get mad, because that one look at he woman, and then the other one going jump in and thing.*

As much as he loved his hometown, he was also auto-critical, much in the way that Cornel West in his book *Race Matters* talks about self-critique as an ultimate measure of love. West says if a group is to uphold the integrity of its leaders and themselves, they have to be willing and able to both praise and criticize. This criticism should be based on love, humility and kindness. This might be termed *love ethic*, not with the intention to destroy but to uplift (West 2001, 19).

Disappointed by the lack of recognition and support he received while working behind the scenes, Black Diamond decided to take the stage and personally convey his thoughts and emotions through the microphone via the medium of Critical-Calypso. He became a performer.

From observations of this period, compared to the 90s, his expressions were more direct than those of other calypsonians, with limited use of *double entendre*, humor or *mele*.

In an unexpected move, he left his band and joined Mighty Talent and his band OREO, the same man and band he had so vehemently criticized, earlier. He stated that he was a firm believer in unity, and wanted to join forces for the betterment of the calypso culture. In his 2000 calypso entitled 'San Nicolas Doomed' he auto-critically argued that Chocolate City was headed for destruction because of the people of San Nicolas' cynical philosophy on life. He said that '*they'd rather pong mele about their neighbors and not look at themselves*'. Using Christian discourse, he challenged them in his chorus to be reflective of their own actions and to realize that 'none is without sin; no one was higher than thou'.

### **San Nicolas Doomed (2000)<sup>83</sup>**

*God in heaven knows that I would like to see,  
San Nicolas people live in harmony,  
it's like a obeah a curse a spell on we,  
it's like we lose we pride we shame and we dignity,  
it's only gossip we know,  
bad talk your neighbor for so,  
find fault at people like hell,  
see man with woman and tell,  
if anyone of you in here dare to point a finger,  
NO, I thought so, A jiggy jiggy, a jiggy jiggy*

In the second verse, he critically analyzes the '*we is we*' philosophy, and concludes that there is a discrepancy between this constructed philosophy of unification and the actual facts on the ground. He sings:

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<sup>83</sup> Track # 14 verse 1 on YouTube channel

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjZkZyYy8Al\\_t4iOIfkhk7Yg](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjZkZyYy8Al_t4iOIfkhk7Yg)

*Another slogan we use, is 'we is we',<sup>84</sup>  
 but the damn thing wrong, is we kill we,  
 all other districts could laugh at the way we act,  
 they come and decide for us and that's a fact,  
 when time to stand up we sit,  
 when time to defend we run,  
 when time to open we mouth,  
 like we fraid that they throw we out  
 if anyone of you in here dare to point a finger,  
 NO, I thought so, A jiggy jiggy, a jiggy jiggy*

In his third verse, Black Diamond becomes even more determined as he appeals to 'his' people to start accepting Aruba as One Happy Island. Flashes of him wanting be part of the mainstream One Happy Island narratives, and no longer on the fringes are beginning to manifest. He renounces the 'we/ they' philosophy and proposes a new construct for looking at 'Arubanness'.

He says:

*The flag that we share, belongs to us too,<sup>85</sup>  
 but the way we carry on, it's as if it's not true,  
 I know the expression we use, is 'those Arubans',  
 excluding weself as if we's aliens,  
 we always running we mouth  
 make up all types a stories about,  
 who man sleeping who,  
 and who divorce ain't come true,  
 if anyone of you in here dare to point a finger,  
 NO a thought s, A Jiggy, Jiggy, a Jiggy, jiggy*

### Mid 2000s

The reunion of Black Diamond and Mighty Talent was short lived, as Black Diamond was still frustrated with the way the calypso culture was developing. He left the band OREO and started his own group, Le Groove, because he wanted to go back to\_ what he called\_ 'the sweet groove'

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<sup>84</sup> Verse 2

<sup>85</sup> Verse 3

of calypso. This was in essence a move back to the ‘original’ calypso rhythms and slower more content-based compositions that he first produced in the 90s. His critical guns were aimed mainly at SAC, whom he said were running the calypso culture into the ground because they knew nothing about the basics of calypso. He went back to being the ‘oppositional Anansi’. He accused SAC of being money driven, power hungry capitalists who exploited and commodified ‘we culture’ for ‘their’ commercial interest in service of the One Happy Island at the expense of poor and working people. He compared contemporary calypsonians to sambos in a minstrel show for the elites. He said:

*SAC making a lot of money off we heads and we ain't saying shit. Is like we the monkeys from up here (pariba) entertaining the masses and we barely getting any prize money. They even have the calypso contest on pay per view and we ain't getting a damn thing. Every year SAC making thousands of guilders off of the calypso contest alone. We can't even get decent food and drink. They treating us like slaves. Now they want to come with a rule to censor what we singing about. These people don't have a clue what calypso is about.*

Black Diamond also felt that the art form was not being passed on from generation to generation. According to him, the main cause for this was the way SAC was managing the children’s calypso competition. He was of the opinion that SAC was deliberately committing cultural genocide against the *pariba* people. To Black Diamond, the SAC had a master plan.

*SAC responsible for killing calypso. If you want to kill something you have to tackle it from the root. The root is right here in San Nicolas. Long time ago, little poor boys and girls from The Village with a dream of singing calypso on stage were given a chance by the local band that was training on the field. The only thing you needed was the will to sing. No money was asked. Nowadays the competition is not even held in San Nicolas no more. They say that it was going down there for a while, while they was fixing the Brazil stadium, but look how much years pass and they still ain't bring it back. They kill it. Now the poor little boy and girl from up here don't have the money to catch bus and attend training anymore. Nowadays musicians charging a arm and a leg for compositions. What you getting is a bunch of youngsters singing calypso in pure Papiamento who don't understand a damn thing about we culture and tradition. It's a blatant disrespect. SAC had this in mind a long time.*

Black Diamond's calypso 'Kaiso Killers' was a frontal attack on the carnival establishment. He pleaded for a return to the *drum* and the *bass* which he viewed as a symbolic representative of Africa, the motherland, of most of the ancestors before their transatlantic journey. 'If we are to get back to "real" calypso, the trail of the middle passage, back to the ancient wisdoms of the motherland is the only path we should follow'. In this performance, he donned an African robe. It was his proclamation that 'Chocolate City *we-ness*' doesn't coincide with SAC's idea of Aruba, but rather with the Black Caribbean experience and the motherland, Africa. His background singers were of the coffee, mocha and caramel complexion and wore head ties resembling Rita Marley with the 'I threes' on tour with Bob. Diamond sang:

### **Kaiso Killers (2002)<sup>86</sup>**

*One a di most serious problems we facing,  
is that di basics of kaiso dying,  
all a them sweet kaiso legendary music  
it's like thing from di past cause they kill it  
internationally it's an upset,  
48 years past, they can't sing yet,  
like they can't get it straight with di culture,  
a variety a language take over  
like when they can't rhyme they use Papiamento  
such an old trick in the book di judges don't know,  
it's a frantic situation for di mind  
we got to bring back di drum and di bassline  
di dup, dup a dup, di di di di dap du du dap du du dey  
(Chorus)  
Hey oh Lord, they killing calypso,  
they got di neck on di gallows,  
oh god they killing calypso,  
they should consider it murdah,  
oh god they killing calypso,  
when another culture take over.*

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<sup>86</sup> Track # 15 verse 1 on YouTube channel

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjZkZyYy8Al\\_t4iOIfkhk7Yg](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjZkZyYy8Al_t4iOIfkhk7Yg)

Papiamentu is characterized here as the language of clear skinned Aruban, and if one should sing in this code, one will not be authentic, it would not be back to the Roots. This a different perspective from Mighty Talent's use of the language that we had seen in the previous chapter. Mighty Talent sees this clearly as an asset rather a limitation. Black Diamond here embodies the problematic contradictions inherent in such binary thinking that typifies some extreme versions of afro-centrism since he is also a native Papiamentu speaker as his mother is from Curaçao, where Papiamentu(u) is considered to be a black language, i.e. the language of the descendants of slaves. He warns the folks of *pariba* not to let the 'town man' which he sees as the capitalist class, strip them of their culture represented by the drum and the bass which are part of the last bastion of English Caribbean culture in Aruba. If one also allows this to pass, his people would have lost their last grain of dignity. He expresses a genuine fear of the commercialization and appropriation of his beloved music, when he sings:

*San Nicolas too passive for protesting,<sup>87</sup>  
 the only thing they care about is enjoying,  
 that why we never really getting nothing,  
 and the little that we have that too they taking,  
 look around all that's left is we culture,  
 and that is even getting smaller and smaller,  
 no man is man enough to open he damn mouth  
 and express what he feel from he heart out,  
 how long more, we going endure all this torture,  
 before we realize they take over,  
 this last death warrant you can't sign,  
 unless you leave them strip you from di drum and di bassline.*

A year after his groundbreaking performance, for the first time coming out and telling it like it is, Black Diamond was involved in a controversy at a traditional Aruban folk music festival, *Festival di Himno y Bandera*. Black Diamond was initially invited to perform at this festival, but

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<sup>87</sup> Verse 3

was then turned away by the organizers because his calypso entitled ‘A Song for Betico’ did not meet their criteria for Aruban *Tipico* [typical folk] song. Some of the organizers said that calypso was not part of Aruba’s culture, a sentiment that was to be found in various places on the island. For example, a newspaper article appeared that year whose headline read ‘*Calypso no ta cultura di Aruba*’ [Calypso is not the culture of Aruba] which was written by a ‘*habitante di San Nicolas*’ [a San Nicolas citizen] (Emanuelson 2015). This controversy caused a firestorm in the newspapers as a big discussion unfolded about what should be considered to be Aruban culture and the role of Critical-Calypso and Roadmarch-Calypso music therein.

In his response, Black Diamond came out with a furious attack on his critics, in which he dared to claim that Aruba was a country where black people were discriminated. This was touching the ultimate taboo subject, the pink elephant in the room; the public secret. The issue of racism clearly clashed with some of the Narratives of the One Happy Island that were propagated by the tourism marketing machine. Studies by [Green, Alofs & Merkies, Razak] and others have made this point, as have other Critical-Calypsonians such as Young Quicksilver in for example ‘The village good, the village bad’, Young Spitfire in ‘How things was’ referring to the beauty queen competitions and Mighty Talent in ‘Black Man’.

In a state of complete disillusionment, his only method of comprehension involved dichotomizing his existence. He sought strength in a mythical Ethiopia. It seemed that he couldn’t comprehend the creolization, ‘we are one family’ process, which he later tried to articulate in the early 2000s, and accept a role therein. In his performance his face was tense, his eyebrows frowned and his lips were stiff as he belted out a barrage of lyrical ammunition in an infuriated manner. As he was ferociously jumping on stage, it seemed as if he were carrying the

entire plight of the African Diaspora everywhere on his shoulders. In his calypso

‘Discrimination’ he sang:

**Discrimination (2003)**<sup>88</sup>

*I was invited, I ain't storm no competition,  
as a proud black Arubian, I accept di invitation  
little did I know bout di discomfort it had up ahead in the valley,  
discrimination ain't done they still killing di black man,  
and how me own fellow Arubans, was about to discriminate me,  
discrimination ain't don they still killing di blackman,  
it's a shame to see how we country divided between we  
discrimination ain't done they still killing di blackman,  
from down so the call in di radio, to say that Diamond ain't no Rubiano they kick up storm in the  
newspaper and say that kaiso isn't we culture.*

*(chorus)*

*If home self we discriminating where to run now,  
If home self we discriminating where do we belong now,  
ring ling a ling,  
it's a serious thing,  
ring ling a ling,  
it's an Aruban thing*

He continues by claiming that only via the arts can the black man reveal his vision of a ‘true’ essential identity without the judgment of society coming down on him. The idea of creolization does not figure in this philosophical equation. The One Happy Island of Aruba as a ‘racial democracy’ was just a myth. In one of our conversations, he told me that multi-voiced calypso performance was schizophrenic, and that one had to keep it straight. Calypso was the only fissure within his world that he could use to expose the ills of society. Politics was too formal and education was only for the upper classes. He questioned the exclusive interpretation of Aruban culture by some, where European musical genres such as the mazurka and the waltz are

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<sup>88</sup> Track # 16 verse 1 on YouTube channel

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjZkZyYy8Al\\_t4i0Ifkhk7Yg](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjZkZyYy8Al_t4i0Ifkhk7Yg)



accepted, while steelpan music and calypso performed by the disenfranchised in places like Trinidad and San Nicolas were frowned upon. In another verse he sang:

*I accept it I ain't fret bout di decision,  
as I sit home and look back at the competition,  
is only on a kaiso stage a black man could really express his opinion  
without getting his backbone break or suffering some serious repercussion,  
discrimination ain't don they still killing di black man,  
so I going well sing bout discrimination  
and let them 'down there' say I looking confusion  
discrimination ain't don they still killing di black man,  
until they stop with 'they' racist ways and accept Aruba as one happy nation  
discrimination ain't don they still killing di black man,  
what I don't understand bout Aruba,  
is how di tingilingi box become we culture,  
they must a bring down from Italy or Russia,  
while Trinidad and Tobago much closer*

### Late 2000s

In 2007 Black Diamond composed a Roadmarch-Calypso with a Critical-Calypso message entitled 'King of di Road' that was sung by T-Money in which he criticized the SAC for not recognizing their contributions and also indicating that democratically they were the people's choice.<sup>89</sup> As mentioned elsewhere, in calypso '*di road*' is what determines true greatness and liberation. T-Money sang:

### **King of the road (2008)<sup>90</sup>**

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<sup>89</sup> One could also give social commentary via Roadmarch-Calypso; although not common amongst Aruban calypsonians. In Trinidad, this technique is more frequently used. In Aruba, Black Diamond started employing this approach post 2005 as he felt that there was little interest in the slower Critical-Calypso. This approach is essentially Critical-Calypso to a fast 'party beat'.

<sup>90</sup> Track # 17 verse 1 on YouTube channel

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjZkZyYy8Al\\_t4iOIfkhk7Yg](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjZkZyYy8Al_t4iOIfkhk7Yg)

*Normally mankind can see high high from the mountain top,  
but in Aruba they does steel us from the mountain top,  
you going tell me after so much years,  
of bringing passion and plenty tears,  
that they can't see, di island can't see,  
for di years of fun, years of laughter, years of happiness,  
words cannot describe it's a feeling that you just can't miss,  
maybe SAC got a heart of stone,  
only want see certain band alone,  
they can't see, they damn well could see*

*(Chorus)*

*Who is di King of di Road, King of di Road, Le Groove is di King of di Road,  
(Hook)*

*we don't need di park, we don't need the judges,  
no way, we don't need the system, they full a corruption*

In reference to the line 'we don't need the judges; no way, we don't need the system, they full of corruption', Black Diamond said:

*It's simple, after all these years of making music the people love and accept all over this island. Le Groove fans are no longer only San Nicolas people, they come from all over the island. They like we style because we don't kiss ass to the system. I am convinced that the system is rigged. It's what I call the Matrix. The Matrix is a system that these greedy folks, run to manipulate every shit out here. The outcome is known beforehand. The Matrix is the reason young black boys and gials from the village can't compete anymore. Only rich town people children singing now. They ain't even know what they doing. The reason why none of my singers never win the competition is because The Matrix know I on to them. I have to fight it with tooth and nail. The way I see it now; it doesn't even make sense for me to participate in the competition. I'd rather sing for my people on di road.*

The Matrix, a concept he took from the 1999 sci-fi action movie was like some of the Narratives of the One Happy Island in a sense, which symbolically represented the dominant class who had far reaching powers in society. It was like Babylon, the system so to speak, which was dictating the flow of things, but you could not pinpoint who they were or where they were sitting. The Matrix was responsible for the exploitation of the poor and the working class.

In 2008, SAC and the Matrix, as he calls them, banned him from performing, for two years in their calypso competitions, because he had allegedly made unfounded accusations about

them being a corrupt organization. He said this several times on air and in public on several occasions, including carnival parades. According to existing documents, this was the first time ever any governing body of the Calypso Festival had prohibited a singer from performing. Right before the 2009 Calypso Festival, he initiated a court case against the SAC to reinstate him to the competition. The headline in the online news website 24ora.com on Friday, January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2009 read *Anthony Gario presente pa Calypso & Roadmarch contest*

*Awe a tuma lugar e caso unda cu Sr. Anthony Gario a hiba Sac dilanti mesa berde pa asina wak si ainda e lo por tin un chens pa participa durante Calypso & Roadmarch contest. Nos tur sa cu Sr. Gario a ricibi un carta di Sac ta splicando Sr. Gario lo no por participa den Calypso & Roadmarch contest durante anja 2009 te cu 2011. Esaki sigur no a cay na agrado di Sr. Gario y pa e motibo aki a hiba Sac corte. Ambos abogado a sa di presenta nan ponencianan dilanti mesa berde pa asina splica of convence huez pakiko nan a tuma desicion asina drastico. Na final ambos partido a jega na un comprendimento cu otro y cu ta pone cu Sr. Gario lo por participa durante Calypso & Roadmarch contest.*

[Today the court case took place, where Mr. Anthony Gario took SAC to court, in order to see whether there is still a possibility for him to participate in the Calypso & Roadmarch contest. We all know that Mr. Gario received a letter from SAC explaining to Mr. Gario that he is not allowed to participate in the Calypso & Roadmarch contest from the year 2009 up to the year 2011. This of course was not pleasing to Mr. Gario, and for this reason he took SAC to court. Both lawyers presented their arguments to the judge in order to explain to or convince the judge why such drastic measures were taken. In the end both parties came to an agreement with one another, which permitted Mr. Gario to participate in the Calypso & Roadmarch contest].

It seemed that even within the limited space allowed by SAC for permissible dissent, the doors were being slammed. Many calypso fans and others saw this as an act of injustice, and as a result, Black Diamond and his band Le Groove attracted an even bigger following. The fans felt, ‘if there was any place you could say what you feel uncensored it is on the calypso stage’. Le Groove started an anti-establishment ‘Pink for Life’ revolution and movement with most of its supporters opposed to the more ‘neo-Arubanized’ form of calypso. They symbolically wore pink, for reasons he would not reveal. The only thing he told me is that it had nothing to do with

breast cancer awareness. They also opposed SAC and criticized the organization, heavily, for their incompetence organizing the Calypso Festival and choosing the judges for the contest. They felt that the competition was rigged and that SAC held a grudge against Black Diamond.

After the court case, Black Diamond and Le Groove, did eventually participate with eleven singers, none of whom qualified for the final night. This prompted even more disdain for the SAC by him and the Pink 4 Life Movement. These are some of the reactions from the public the day after the disqualification, '*conjo y le groove no a gana? e cantica aki ta tonti bon!! SAC ta corrupto berdad !!*' [damn, Le Groove did not win? This song is fucking good!! SAC is really corrupt!!], another person said, '*i love this song [Shirt off] pero jammer genoeg SAC a manage di haya delaster technicality pa zorg nan cai afo*'. [I love this song (Shirt off) but it's a pity that SAC managed find the last little technicality to make sure (Le Groove) stayed out].

This led to a massive boycott of the calypso contest, in which arguably thousands of supporters participated in a counter-gathering, called the 'Are We Together Jam'. Pink 4 Life, along with some other groups who were eliminated performed on a baseball field in the district of Brazil, camouflaged as a sporting event. The event was promoted by means of social media, BlackBerry and sms. Carnival radio DJs took sides, and either encouraged or discouraged fans from attending the festival. Anticipating a financial loss for the official Calypso Festival, on Saturday, February 7<sup>th</sup> 2009, SAC filed an injunction to stop this event from taking place, alleging it was against the law, and SAC is the only organization that has the legal mandate to organize events during the carnival season. The headlines read, *SAC ta hiba organisacion di evento di awe nochi corte* [SAC is taking the organizer of tonight's event to court].

*Awe a wordo anuncia un evento cu lo tuma lugar na veld di centro di bario brazil cu lo tin 6 banda como invitado. Ta trata aki di un 'we are together jam'. Bandanan ta le groove, youth xtreme, climax, dushi band y otronan. Aparentemente Anthony Gario lo ta tras di e organisacion aki. E evento ta wordo propaganda di ta completamente gratis.*

*Debi cu durante e temporada di carnaval tur actividad mester haja aprobacion di SAC y SAC no a aproba evento aki mirando cu e ta riba e mesun dia cu calypso y roadmarch final, Sac a opta pa entama un kortgeding pa para e evento aki. Asina cu e resultado ta conoci 24ora.com lo informa su bishitantenan. E evento por a sigi pero enbes di 6 banda un banda so lo por toca.*

[Today it was announced that an event will be held at the field of Centro di Bario Brazil, with 6 musical bands performing as guests. This involves a ‘we are together jam’. The musical bands are Le Groove, Youth X-treme, Climax, Dushi Band and others. Apparently, Anthony Gario is the driving force behind this organization. This event is being advertised as to be completely free of charge. Any events that are taking place during the carnival season must be approved by SAC and seeing that this event is being held on the same evening of the finals of the Calypso & Roadmarch contest, SAC did not give their approval. SAC filed a preliminary injunction in order to stop this event. As soon as the result is known 24ora.com will inform their visitors. This event could have continued if one band participated, but not six].

The event went on as planned and to my own surprise, when I reached the venue, there was a multitude present. Interestingly, the ‘are we together jam?’ encouraged more people to join the Pink 4 Life Movement. From my observations, I could see that his supporters were diverse and no longer just people from *pariba*, but instead from all over the island. His revolutionary message had resounded all over the island.

When I asked him about his banning and the ‘are we together jam’, he explained:

*How in the hell, you could ban somebody from singing calypso? If ain't here I could express my opinion, where else could I do it? These people crazy. Year after year I producing massive hits, that the crowd on the streets love. I ain't making music for the park only, I making music to last a life time. I making music that the people on the street could enjoy, could feel. Most of the winning songs in the competition never become hits because the system of judging is not correct. They have a set of people judging that don't know we culture. With the boycott we had to send SAC a message because they couldn't continue like this. You see how much blows they get financially. You know they lose a lot of money. You see how big the Pink 4 Life movement becoming. We now have people from all down Santa Cruz, Paradera, Tanki Leendert and Noord. It's not just a San Nicolas thing anymore.*



Illustration 19 Album cover of Le Groove's CD entitled **Soca Terrorization**

In one of his final attempts to topple SAC, the cover of his 2010 Roadmarch-Calypso CD *Soca Terrorization* depicts several grenades in front of flames burning, a mask with feathers and a manifesto-like set of demands and objectives, including dissolving the carnival committee, blowing up carnival, liberating soca lovers, bringing musical troops together and saving soca in Aruba. Each of the Le Groove's members carry a specific rank in this army of 'terrorists' that declared it has unplugged itself from the Matrix. In his 2010 carnival hit entitled *Soca Terrorist* (Kaboom), Black Diamond's son, Diamond Chip, poses as a terrorist with the intention of wreaking havoc on those who oppose Black Diamond's calypso philosophy. He sang:

### **Soca Terrorist (Kaboom) 2010<sup>91</sup>**

*Bombs falling, Bombs falling, Carnival Bombs falling*

<sup>91</sup> Track # 18 verse 1 on YouTube channel

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjZkZyYy8Al\\_t4i0Ifkhk7Yg](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjZkZyYy8Al_t4i0Ifkhk7Yg)

*Diamond Chip just come back again,  
 with this power tune make,  
 to blow down a friend,  
 kaboom, kaboom kaboom,  
 in di barnyard full of explosives,  
 a blow-up St Martin, a throw bombs in Statia,  
 I throw bombs all ova,  
 a blow up Anguilla, kill all me partners,  
 they send me straight Russia.  
 A come to blow up carnival this year,  
 me and the sharks don't care,  
 like a soca terrorist,  
 a come to blow up carnival,  
 eh eh kaboom, kaboom,  
 a come to mash up di party,  
 we terrorizing di party.*

The terrorist travels to different islands in the region to make his statement, eventually coming to Aruba and doing the same. He is even sent to a labor camp in Russia as punishment for defying the Matrix. The warrior represents a person with a certain ideology but without any means to fight a full-fledged battle. Whatever means he has at his disposal, he will use in honor of his vision and version of calypso music.

### From outside to inside the Matrix

Late in 2010, I noticed a sudden shift in Black Diamond's tone towards the powers that be, the Matrix. After vehemently fighting the government, he accepted a civil service position in the government as a project manager in the *pariba* area. The same government he had so heavily criticized. I was startled. I thought, how could a man who had made it his personal duty to challenge every politician and government official for neglecting his hometown end up in bed with the masters of the Matrix? In 2011, Black Diamond even composed a song for T-Money accompanied by a short video screen on stage depicting the government's 'achievements' in San

Nicolas. T-Money sang about the reopening of the oil refinery after being closed for a long period. He also sang about some renewed economic interest in San Nicolas. Many in the community saw this as nothing more than a political campaign for the sitting government. In a casual conversation a person told me, *‘they sweeten up he mouth now with a lil sugar’*. Some of his critics felt that Black Diamond had sold out to the authorities in exchange for his compliance on the calypso stage and elsewhere and that he was now also part of the Matrix. There was even a post on social media, wondering, why Black Diamond hadn’t sung a Critical-Calypso since his government was in office. In ‘San Nicolas Moving Up’ T-Money sang:

### **San Nicolas Moving Up (2011)<sup>92</sup>**

*Well look around and see now  
Valero just open,  
so we really improving,  
in we mind we was going down,  
think again my friend,  
but we moving up up,  
we moving up, we moving up,  
Uptown (San Nicolas) we really moving up*

One afternoon, as I was driving through the main street of San Nicolas, I saw Black Diamond painting the walls of the stores in San Nicolas as part of the government’s project to revitalize the main street area. I remember parking my car on the sidewalk in front of Caribbean Bar. He had on working clothes and was smudged with paint. Sweat was dripping from his glistening forehead after working in the hot mid-day Aruban sun. Still puzzled, I asked him why he had begun making songs in Papiamentu and why he was supporting government. He looked at me with an intense face and told me:

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<sup>92</sup> Track # 19 verse 1 on YouTube channel

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjZkZyYy8Al\\_t4iOIfkhk7Yg](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjZkZyYy8Al_t4iOIfkhk7Yg)



*Listen all these years I fight the government with tooth and nail, I only get blows. They mash me up bad. I pass through fire for trying to maintain my integrity and being true to the music of my people. I always write what I thought to be correct. After all these years, what I accomplish? So that's why I start to work from within the Matrix. I think I could change a lot more from within than from without. Outside they only closing doors in ma face. I seeing things from whole different perspective now. There is a lot going on in here that you don't see on the outside. Whether the government like it or not I going make sure I steer some of these projects in San Nicolas favor. I gong keep reminding them that they made a promise. From inside I have better access. I am in the Matrix but not part of the Matrix.*

He seemed to have been converted or perhaps converted himself to a form of pragmatism with the intention, as he saw it, to maximize his full potential. Trinidadian calypso monarch Karene Ashe made a similar point when she sang ‘*better the devil that you have than the one you do not know*’ which means that since life is about choices in an evil society, it is best to choose the least evil option. Black Diamond also told me:

*My daughter went to study to become a doctor. She said that she wanted to go through the Latin American system (Costa Rica). Do you have any idea how much money I have to pay additionally so that she could follow her dream? I believe that sometimes you have to sacrifice of yourself so the upcoming generation could have. What we people have meant to this island and how they build up Aruba to what it is with their blood sweat and tears I also want to give my children. You think I could help my daughter by bashing and ripping the government every year in calypso?*

I was still puzzled!

## Conclusion

Having witnessed his trajectory over the past few decades with regard to how he has dealt with some of the Narratives of the One Happy Island, Black Diamond strives to be the ‘poor man’s newspaper’, the ‘voice of the people’ and the ‘voice of the marginalized’. In certain circles, he'd even be considered more favorably than Mighty Talent, as his style of Critical-Calypso is less *mele-esque* [gossipy] and more direct. In comparison to Mighty Talent, Black Diamond could be

considered to be ‘the warrior’, and a ‘calypso revolutionary’ that challenges, head on, the perceived injustices of the One Happy Island.

Despite his essentialist rhetoric, a pragmatic thread runs throughout his story that has him joining the ranks of government after he had incessantly criticized them, or changing his stance on singing in other languages besides San Nicolas English after he had vowed never to do so. We can observe here that nothing is ever truly essential and absolute, and every time an attempt is made to neatly classify people in such classifications, there is resistance because the human spirit always seems to defy being told ‘who it is’, ‘how to act’ and ‘what to do,’ no matter where the message is coming from. Not even themselves.

There is no denying the impact that Black Diamond has exerted through his Critical-Calypsos. There have been many discussions about his songs, and they have led to many debates on race relations in Aruba and the position of San Nicolas and its calypso musicians on the island. Coming from humble beginnings, he has managed to carve out a space for himself and his work, and through his agency, he has become the catalyst for different movements whereby the masses (especially those from *pariba*, but also some from *pabou*) have found a voice against particular versions of the Narratives of the One Happy Island that they felt did not represent them. Black Diamond expresses those sentiments that many of us in Aruba would like to, but because we are so trapped in the symbolic rhetoric and image of some of the Narratives of the One Happy Island, we do not or cannot articulate them. Even with all his so called ‘issues’, people have still paid attention to him, especially the politicians.

Returning to my original argument that Black Diamond’s magnificent Critical-Calypso repertoire is not sufficient to make the Narratives of the One Happy Island irrelevant, I contend that his work at best tickles the dynamics of symbolization and perhaps even giving many

Narratives of the One Happy Island a good challenge, but not rendering them inoperable. This is so primarily for the following reasons. Both the dominant discourses of the Narratives of the One Happy Island, as well as the revolutionary counter-discourses of Black Diamond, can be considered two poles of one of the multitudes of binaristic illusions that is the dynamics of symbolization. Because of this, the capacity of Critical-Calypso is in many ways limited in terms of its ability to bring about any real change that moves us beyond these binary illusions. The people perhaps understand this consciously or subconsciously and perhaps mostly see Critical-Calypso as an intellectual game that, if played well, may be good for the expression of ironic anger, and the elicitation of a laugh which produces *plaisir*, yet when it is time to take action, they don't really run with it. In a way in Critical-Calypso, the performer tells the story to the crowd, which plays the role of passive listener with little or no impulse to assume agency. One of the reasons the authorities feel that they can tolerate, even the most acerbic versions Critical-Calypso, is because very little 'writerly' action is taken by the thousands of people who, so enthusiastically, view and applaud the performances after the Calypso Festival is over. In fact, the authorities also applaud these same performances, as it is part of the ritual.

Black Diamond therefore can be seen as having consciously engaged with the dynamics of symbolization for the most part throughout his career. It seems that he has always mistakenly attributed his success to his Critical-Calypsonian lyrics, that is the symbolic, *readerly* text aspect of his work, but perhaps, these lyrics may only have played a minor role. Critical-Calypso in the end provides some good talking points for the intellectual few, but has never been able to mobilize large crowds to any concerted, long-term action. When Black Diamond sings, people pay attention during those five minutes, but after that just like Mighty Talent, the party must go on.

Just as what he refers to as the Matrix is an illusory ‘smoke and mirrors game’ constructed by ruling classes, so is his Critical-Calypso just a counter-game that symbolically tries to deconstruct that same ‘smoke and mirrors game’. By trying to challenge the dynamics of symbolization by deconstructing the Matrix in his Critical-Calypso, Black Diamond, I argue, has not really unsettled the Narratives of the One Happy Island. When Black Diamond sees that people are not heeding his cries to deconstruct the Matrix, he becomes frustrated, and like so many former revolutionaries and academicians, he is now a mouthpiece for the dominant discourses, and thereby part of the Matrix itself, positioning himself just where the dominant classes want him to be.<sup>93</sup> He justifies his new role by blaming the people of San Nicolas. He says they never listened to what he was saying, they were too passive, and the people of San Nicolas never stand up for anything.

As I will elaborate upon in the next chapter, the real power of Black Diamond’s work relies, more in its Roadmarch-Calypso aspect which has made him a success among the people, rather than in his Critical-Calypso lyrics. It is mainly through the Back to the Roots Movement and the Pink 4 Life Movement that he is able to mobilize the masses to action that represents a serious threat to many of the Narratives of the One Happy Island, and the monetary interests of the people who profit from it. This is where the dominant classes and the authorities need to step in and ban him and use the courts to suppress his organized events. This process is described in more detail by Fiske (1989) in his discussion of popular culture; his ideas show that when popular culture is gaining too much traction in the eyes of the dominant class, and subsequently becomes a threat to the established codes of living, so called ‘strategies of discipline’ are

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<sup>93</sup> For example, former Black Panther Leroy Eldridge Cleaver, who became a conservative republican in his later years. Some have also questioned Nelson Mandela’s post Robin Island pacifistic approach towards post-apartheid reconciliation in South Africa.

employed. Either via *repressive legislation*, for example; banning or outlawing certain activities or via *containment*, where they enforce strict rules on the activity, in a sense sanitize it, to make it acceptable to dominant class.<sup>94</sup>

Black Diamond's Roadmarch-Calypsos really moves the masses, because when they experience it, perhaps they sense that it is pulverizing the binary illusions that underlie the dynamics of symbolization, and thereby moves them to a possible *jouissance* by means of the *breakaway*. In the end, it is this same reason that makes them such avid fans of Black Diamond. But perhaps he and most of the academics who study calypso music culture, including myself, are so caught up in the dynamics of symbolization that we can't really see.

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<sup>94</sup> Some examples that Fiske gives are the outlawing of 'kock fighting' as it is seen as barbaric or the implementation of strict rules in wrestling that it may be just enough of an entertainment and not savagery. Also the domestication of football in stadiums with strict rules of conduct.

## PART III

### Chapter 7

#### Roadmarch-Calypso and the *Sweet Breakaway*

Road on fire  
 Road on fire  
 carnaval bacchanal  
 carnaval festival  
**Mighty Cliffy**

#### Background

As I said before, Roadmarch-Calypso was what least fascinated me about calypso when I was younger. Despite it being great dance party music or *musica di carnaval*, I always considered it to be music without a meaningful message. My position was in line with much of the common criticism of soca music (Shaw 2007; Dikobe 2004), in Trinidad and throughout much of the Anglophone Caribbean and the diasporas in North America and Europe. Caribbean music researcher, Jocelyne Guilbault gives a clear description of this sentiment:

However, for many Trinidadians—whether it relates to a particular understanding of morality, a distinct sense of respectability and propriety, aesthetic values, or an interest exclusively in lyrical content—party music in political terms is often dismissed as being escapist, hedonistic, and commercial. Out of these three ‘evils’, commercialism, it could be suggested, has been viewed culturally and socially as the most potentially damaging. The assumption is that commercial music gains its power by using sentiments of joy and pleasure exclusively for economic profit. Furthermore, ‘based on the longstanding tension between passion and reason in Western thought’ (Yanagisako 2002, 8) and the belief that passion leads to irrational action, the focus of music such as soca, which is

designed to elicit joy and pleasure, has been viewed not only with distrust, but also as having little or no potential for political action or social transformation. (Guilbault 2011, 9)

As I briefly mentioned in the introduction, my sentiments changed through a ‘road to Damascus moment’, when I experienced the effect Roadmarch-Calypso could have on the masses and the possible space of liberation and power it opened up for the otherwise marginalized. As it might have become clearer now, this is also the basis for the main argument of this dissertation which contends; that it is perhaps the *breakaway* of Roadmarch-Calypso, instead of exclusively the Critical-Calypso, that possibly has the ability to deliver profound critique and even induce *jouissance* which produces moments at which many of the Narratives of the One Happy Island become irrelevant; at least shut down temporarily.

In the past years, more scholarly attention has been given in the impact of Roadmarch-Calypso [soca] in other areas, including the political. For a quick impression we see for example Camille Hernandez-Ramdwar (2008) in particular looking at *fete-ing* by a so called soca posse in Toronto as a form of cultural resistance.<sup>95</sup> Guilbault (2010) has looked at soca music and its relation to joy and pleasure, politics, and a means of bringing people of diverse backgrounds together in the midst of violence. Natasha Barnes argues that ‘live performance, as recent theorization in performance studies reminds us that it has transformative capabilities that can exist independent of capitalist reproduction and co-option when experienced in live encounters’ (Barnes 2000, 98).

Within this context, it is important that we take a closer look at Roadmarch-Calypso in Aruba. Using a number of thick descriptions, including several song texts, to present both behavior and context, this chapter sheds light on what possibly happens when there is a

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<sup>95</sup> A group of people who have a common characteristic, occupation, or purpose.

*breakaway* to a possible *jouissance*. It looks at the different experiences even though we could only assume what *jouissance* might be like.<sup>96</sup>

One example I will highlight took place at the 1985 Calypso Festival, when a particular Roadmarch-Calypso singer by the name of Mighty Cliffy had worked the entire crowd into a frenzy. Some eye-witnesses could not recall having seen a phenomenon of this sort in their entire lives. Some people have said, '*esaki tawata e miho roadmarch di tur tempo*'. [This was the best roadmarch of all time]. This event has gone down in folk lore of the Aruban Calypso Festival.

Another example I will highlight is a performance by a Roadmarch-Calypso singer named T-Money, whose song, 'For Fans Only', more commonly known as Friends and Family, where according to accounts people in the crowd broke into tears during this performance.

I will also elaborate experience involving myself as a teenager *jamming* [dancing in a congested space] behind a Roadmarch-Calypso band named Eclipse.

The final example is a situation where I possibly witnessed a *breakaway* during a Roadmarch-Calypso performance by a singer named the Baron at the 2004 Calypso Festival. I have also spoken to several people in the calypso world who gave me their interpretations of these events. The accounts of these calypso aficionados are woven in throughout the chapter.

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<sup>96</sup> Conversations were held with various persons throughout the research period. As it is a small community many of the meetings were informal in supermarkets, in the church yard, at a bar or an event, at the job etc. Where possible the periods are registered.



## Roadmarch-Calypso and the *Breakaway* from a closer perspective

In Lise Winer's, *Dictionary of the English/Creole of Trinidad & Tobago: On Historical Principles*, the entry for *breakaway* or the *Lavway/Leggo*, which is the Trinidadian English creole term for 'let go', reads as follows:

...the dance which gave the physical interpretation of our calypso or kaiso as it was then called. Simple, lilting, yet with an underlying strength, supported by vibrant percussion of the tambour bamboo, iron triangle, tin drums, and even bottle and spoon. Spontaneity was the order of the day, and improvisations were the norm....There were many occasions for rejoicing and whenever the people did so, inevitably they gave expression in a freedom of style and movement. The term leggo is very appropriate because of its intentions, to let go, to breakaway, to free one's self from the shackles of daily mechanical movements, limitations and inhibitions, religious and social sanctions, in an atmosphere conducive enough to enable one to feel a communal bond with others of the same intentions. (Winer 2008, 523)

One of the biggest takeaways that emerges from this account is that the *breakaway* is an experience that cannot be understood by using a structural functionalist approach. In many ways it was unpredictable. What happens in the *breakaway* according to this account is an impulse to *leggo* or free up. It is to emancipate one's self from the shackles of structure and function. It is to release the professional and social pressures of daily life that keep us constantly in an impossible pursuit of the idealized and binary norms imposed by what has been described in this study as the dynamics of symbolization.

From many of the accounts of those I have interviewed, from what I have observed and of course, my own personal experiences, I got the impression that the *breakaway* is an experience that is consciously sought during the Roadmarch-Calypso. People are aware of the role that they play in bringing about this climactic *jouissance*, by means of the *breakaway*.

During carnival concerts, jam sessions, *jouvert-morning*, outdoor events and parties, the so-called *fetes*, people attend primarily to hear *musica di carnaval*. Local bands know this and



‘familiar and free interaction between people’ takes place. In the lyrics, calypsonian David Rudder comments on an intelligent upper-class lady with eyeglasses, who went to private catholic school, and who under normal circumstances would not associate with people of a lower social ranking, that is, who lives with her ‘feet not touching the ground’.

In this particular *jouissance* she leaves her upper-class partner Brown and goes off with a DEWD man, that is, an employee of the Development Employment Work Program (DEWD) for disadvantaged members of society. Rudder likens this *fete* to ‘madness’, craziness, as he asks ‘*where we going?..... St Anne’s... cause we mad we mad, we mad, we more than mad*’. As you might have guessed, St Anne’s is the psychiatric institution on the island of Trinidad.

Thompson-Ahye depicts a similar scene in her studies on calypso music and culture. She describes how people of the upper classes, who were initially reluctant to participate, eventually *breakaway* together with people of so called low standing and the underworld, such as prostitutes, pimps and ‘uneducated’ public workers when the temptation is too great to resist.

The colorfully dressed and bejeweled ‘jamenttes’ [diameter] and ‘matadors’, women of questionable virtue, and their ‘sweetmen’ who sometimes lived off their earnings and altogether lived a life of free-wheeling and dealing, were the most overt in their expression of the Leggo. In fetes they really did a breakaway and their swinging and swaying with accompanying sensual gestures and postures, went to the extreme in projection. From this stage there were varying degrees of expressiveness, which of course reflected the personality of the individuals concerned. The upperclasses frowned upon all this and described it as lewd, but as in everything else when they could not lick [beat] them [which they tried] they joined them... When they hear a Lavway play, They all jump up and breakaway. (Ahye 1978, 22)

As said in the introduction, we see the *breakaway* as the climax of the song, the ‘mambo’, where the rhythms are more intense and the beat changes and *breaks* with that of the earlier verses. The

main aim of the singer is to ‘create an atmosphere where people can let loose and be free’. Roadmarch-Calypso singers will ask, ‘*ready for the breakaway?*’ to which the crowd will respond with a resounding ‘*yeah*’. At this point the Roadmarch-Calypso performer, either on stage or on a music truck, usually gives a command to the crowd, which the crowd follows. For example, some bands might play their horns in a more profound way or the drummer might start to ruffle the drums. The refrain might become a sing along chorus. At this point in the song, people are required ‘*to get on bad*’. *Bad* meaning breaking with the everyday routine. Breaking with the customary and transgressing the boundaries and categories of restrained culture of everyday existence in hegemonic society. The drum plays an enormous role in inducing the *breakaway* and eventually the *jouissance*. In the essay *Rhythmic Remembrances* by Yvonne Daniel, this role is emphasized.

Drummers make the ‘differences’: they play a completely different rhythm; or they play faster, louder, more forcefully; or they use ‘muffs’ and insert rhythmic and tonal changes—all to generate the proximity of the spirit world. When the dancing body is redied— that is, when the dancing body has penetrated the sacred gateway—the central core of the trunk is either extended with the extremities spread apart or contracted and vibrating rapidly and erratically. Often the worshiping priest medium/performer hops on one foot, then arches the back and exposes the entire body. In the characteristic dance patterns for each divinity, there is a climax or augmented motion; a full-bodied display results, sometimes in sustained energy, as in slow and complete body undulation (e.g., in the feint of *yenvalu*), and sometimes percussively, as in the preparation for a rapid strike or at an implosion of energy/ (e.g., in the broad steps of *Chango* or the swift and erratic shifts of *Yansan*). Musicians in Fon, Yoruba, and other African ethnic groups of the past came to understand that specific codified intervals, sounded as drummed rhythms in a series, were able to produce physical, emotional, and spiritual transformations inside the believing and prepared body. (Daniel 2010, 86)

During the *breakaway* it is said that people are known to throw their hands in the air, twist their hands, jump up and down, *wine their waists*, *grind up on somebody* [rub their genital area on someone’s buttocks, or vice versa, to the beat], *wuck up* [perform an aggressive waist movement], *choock* [stab their waist] back and forth, wave their flag, run up and down, bend

down low, swing their hands, go forward, reverse, jump up on stage during a performance, jump on and off speakers, dance on speakers, spread their arms in a flying motion, defy the orders of the police or any other authority and much more. All types of dancing bodies come together simultaneously and participate in this frenzied state where the energy sweeps over, under and through the entire crowd.

Many of these movements would, under everyday circumstances, thought to be shameful, overtly sexual, exhibitionistic, scandalous, grotesque and unrestrained; considered to be low class. The typical reactions of those contrary to this behavior would be, '*hubentud di awendia no tin respet pa nan mes, nan ta bulgar*' [the youths of today dance very vulgarly] or '*these people ain't dancing, they having sex with they clothes on*'.

Despite having definite sexual undertones, many personal accounts, as we will see, also confirm that what is involved is much more than just a drunken, erotic experience that many critical studies earlier referenced to often relegate this phenomenon to. Perhaps, what is experienced through *breakaway*, from my observations, is much less like that which is experienced during an erotic encounter; for example, in brothels or strip clubs than it is like what occurs during celebrations of Afro-Atlantic spirituality by believers in Vodoun, Candomblé, Santería and Spiritual Baptism. In some cases, it is also akin to what is experienced during charismatic and Pentecostal services when the 'holy ghost' descends upon the worshipers. During these services, church goers are known to speak in tongues [glossalalia], run up and down the aisle, spin around, fall down, have convulsions, get messages from God and so on (Sheller 2012; Wariboko 2014). Accounts have also indicated that Catholics who recite the rosary continuously also open up spaces for these experiences (Szuchewycs 1997), as do the Sufi orders in Islam, and other groups of believers within many other 'mystic(al)' religious traditions.

I have not heard of anyone ‘speaking tongues’ or having convulsions during the *breakaway*, but it did not seem impossible.

Mamadou Diouf and Ifeoma Kiddoe Nwankwo talk about how African derived music and dance have multiplex layers of meaning and function, as do the creolized languages, cultures and identities that typify the Caribbean and the rest of the Afro-Atlantic. These layers of meaning and function often include an erotic component, but only to the extent that the erotic is not separated from the rest of human experience. Specifically, in religion, dance and music. Diouf and Kiddoe Nwankwo note that:

African music is ‘always music for dance’, and African dances are ‘polymorphic music, with upper and the lower parts of the body appearing to move to two different, related clocks.’ Not only are they ‘pleasurable and erotic,’ but they are also powerful spiritual grammars and rituals of socialization, languages of interventions in nature and society, contributing to the expression of African religious and cultural beliefs and manifestations of and engagements with historical (dis)continuities. (Diouf & Nwanko 2010, 2)

In a conversation with Richard, a self-proclaimed diehard carnival *reveler* [participant], who frequents most *jouvert-morning* parades and *jam sessions*, he told me that the *breakaway* is indeed an element of all Roadmarch-Calypso songs but it doesn’t always lead to an all-out frenzy.<sup>98</sup>

*You could tell when a real breakaway happens. You could feel it. Sometimes people ‘get on bad for play’, but it doesn’t mean that the music has really hit them. When the music really hit you, you going to know the difference. There won’t be a quiet soul in the park. It’s an unbelievable experience. I remember one time I witnessed a Roadmarch-Calypso in the park that went on for more than 10 minutes. It was as if the people them was possessed. When they hear that tune they gone crazy. They will leave anybody behind and jam behind the truck. Is like they does forget who they be. They don’t care.*

On the basis of Richard’s account, and reflecting on the idea of ‘*breakaway* for play’ where it looked like it to a large degree but wasn’t. I began to understand that the Aruban *breakaway*

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<sup>98</sup> Richard, in conversation with author, at his home, July 2011, Aruba

version of *jouissance* did not automatically ensue whenever a performer happens to say ‘*breakaway*’; it was more complex. Further in the text an example hereof will be given such as in the case of calypsonian T-Money.

### Mighty Cliffy and Road on Fire (1985)

To find out how others experienced a ‘real’ *breakaway* in Aruba, I spoke to DJ Jean.<sup>99</sup> We struck up a good working relationship and to this day we frequently converse. DJ Jean is a famous Calypso DJ and an avid collector of old Aruban calypsos. He has the largest collection of calypsos of one of Aruba’s most famous calypso legends, Lord Boxoe, and is considered one of the prominent elders. He told me that he has experienced many *breakaways*, but there were only a few that really stood out. The one that made a lasting impression on him was the 1985 performance of Roadmarch-Calypso singer Mighty Cliffy. The song was entitled ‘Road on Fire’. DJ Jean told me:

*Cliffy was dress up in a fire fighter costume in red with he fire fighter helmet and a hose. When they play the first note you hear a siren sound in the background going woow, woow, woow, beng, beng. He was performing with the biggest and most famous band at the time S-United [Seven United]. They had all kind a disco special effects. They had they own style. As soon as they start playing the people the band members were all into it. When you look at the crowd you see some people moving but not everybody. All of a sudden when Mighty Cliffy started to sing road on fire in his chorus it started to rain. It was as if God help him set up this thing. He continue singing. Don’t forget that Cliffy used to stammer bad. He sing it perfectly. The rain started pouring down even heavier and some people started covering theyself with umbrellas, and raincoats. At the midway point of the song when Cliffy started breaking away and he say ‘carnaval bachacanal’ the people in the park started going crazy. Everybody was soaking wet. They get up off they chair and started jamming all over the place. Some people went on stage throwing the hands in the air and wining like they crazy. People were spinning around like crazy.*

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<sup>99</sup> DJ Jean. Based on many conversations between 2005-2017.

*In the park Cliffy song lasted almost 10 minutes, he went way passed the regulation time. Everyone in the park was in a state of frenzy, even the MC's.*

Mighty Reds, Mighty Cliffy's band mate, saxophonist and Critical-Calypsonian in his own right gave the following account of this particular event in Emanuelson's (2015) *Mighty, Lords, Kings and Queens, Calypso and the Politics of Recognition* documentary:

*When Cliffy started off with that song, Road on Fire, not even self thirty seconds into the song, the rain started to come down. And the more Cliffy sing, the harder it rain. The people wasn't leaving the park, the people just keep jumping-up road on fire road on fire, when we came on the break of the song pana pana. The people in the crowd went off. And Hundreds of people get wet and they didn't care, we were playing, had to be moving not to get wet. Water was falling off of the roof, the people didn't want to go and Cliffy just keep on singing. Cliffy didn't worry with the coordination of the song or nothing. He just sing road on fire jump-up jump-up. As Cliffy started to sing, it started to rain. Playing the saxophone I had to be moving from the rain cause it was coming through the roof. The song did not have any coordination. The band play one thing, Cliffy just continue saying road on fire, road fire, jump up, jump up. The people didn't want to leave the park.*

As Mighty Reds points out in this passage, perfect coordination and organization seemed not a necessity nor sufficient condition for *breakaway* to occur. The Aruban saying '*baila malo pasa bon*' [dancing badly, but having a good time] somewhat illustrates this idea. It looked like it was more about having a good time and who is looking or isn't looking is irrelevant. When we look at the video recording, we see that there was a lack of coordination by the band members, people dancing 'out of rhythm', people running on stage, wanting to sing along, even trying to take over the performance; the participants had a jovial spirit about them, some threw back their heads swinging it from left-to-right with their eyes closed and their index fingers pointed forward in a back and forth motion. Mighty Cliffy himself in this same documentary says:

*Well I'm singing road on fire, and God decided, well let me out this fire. Ha ha, well at least he tried, ha. The second, third verse, when the breakaway came in, tatara, tatara, rain, and then I see the crowd, and I see people, like going like crazy, and I, I lost it myself. If you notice, there is a part where I'm, trying to get off the stage, and here comes these brothers and sisters, like he, got come back up here, you got to go one more time.*



Mighty Cliffo, even says that, the ‘feeling’, which I could imagine to be *jouissance*, was so strong, that God would send rain to out the fire, but that didn’t even work, but, he says, ‘at least he tried’.

The lyrics of Mighty Cliffo’s Road on Fire are quite simple. He is talking about his band passing through the streets on the carnival route accompanied by revelers. When the music ‘*hit them*’ [influences them] the crowd goes wild and the road, the street, catches fire. It becomes hot. In the Caribbean, when a reference is made to a party being hot, *cayente* or ‘on fire’ it means that the party is ‘so enjoyable’ that people do not want to leave. Carnival revelers talk about this fire as a fire that represents eternal passion that cannot be extinguished easily; perhaps it’s the fire and passion of *jouissance*. Others describe *di road* as the path of total freedom and abandon where there are no societal constraints. He sings:<sup>100101</sup>

*When you see this band come down,  
invading di town, when you see the steel band play,  
this music all day, we taking over any town,  
and we going from dawn to sun down,  
(chorus)  
Road on fire, road on fire, road on fire, road fire,  
carnaval, bacchanal, carnaval festival,  
jump up, jump up, jump up hall up,  
road on fire, road on fire, road on fire*

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<sup>100</sup> Mighty Cliffo’s performance <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HgbifPogvjc>

<sup>101</sup> Track # 21 verse 1 on YouTube channel  
[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjZkZyYy8Al\\_t4iOIfkhk7Yg](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjZkZyYy8Al_t4iOIfkhk7Yg)



Illustration 20: Mighty Cliff during his Road on Fire Performance 1985

### Mighty Rusty and ‘Tighter’ (1992)

I can personally recall experiencing something like a *breakaway* and maybe even *jouissance* twice in my lifetime. Or what I only could assume to be. I think I was about fourteen years old when this new band, named Eclipse, appeared on the carnival scene. Their main goal was to ‘eclipse the competition with “real” Roadmarch-Calypso music that went back to the original roots style of Trinidad and the rest of the Eastern Caribbean’ so to speak. This group included Roy Nicholson, Bush Tea-Man, Black Diamond, Mighty Rusty and others. As described in the previous chapter, they all were proponents of a slower Roadmarch-Calypso beat. They identified with singers such as the Mighty Shadow, Lord Kitchener, Explainer, The Mighty Duke, Winston So So, Super Blue and Tambu. Soca music came out of Trinidad in the 70’s and was very

popular with many Arubans from *pariba di brug*. At the time much of Aruba wasn't too fond or too impressed with this type of rhythm. Their remarks were often, '*e no ta di nos*', [it is not ours]. This is what I remembered during a *jamsession* with this band.

I remember a big people's carnival celebration in San Nicolas. I was waiting for the parade to pass with my friends. The streets of Chocolate City were filled with excitement seekers. I saw umbrellas for protection against the sun, and sun block on the faces of little kids. On the side of the streets there were people handing out stubs to put in your ear to protect your eardrums. There was a *palo frio man* [ice-cream man] of Haitian descent selling his popsicles on his 3-wheel bike with a freezer. When the parade was passing in front of a tall glass building, I heard a heavy sound coming from the speakers of a big container truck. There was no container on the truck, but rather musicians playing. The buildings on the narrow streets of San Nicolas were vibrating. One musician was playing a deep-sounding bass guitar; another full-figured musician was playing the drums in an unorthodox way. The trumpet players were blowing their horns like there was no tomorrow, and the keyboard player was jamming in an intense groove. In front and in the back of the truck there were revelers with elaborate costumes, representing the theme of Asia. They were in gold and green with beautiful yellow feathers. There were men and women jamming to the sound of the music. They were chipping, some with Heineken beers in their hands and others with cold Amstels. Their glitter covered skins were glistening as the Caribbean sun was blazing on that day. To the side, I saw a mob of young people on the sidewalks also jamming to the tunes of the soca rhythm. Wherever Eclipse went the mob of youngsters followed. They were held back by the red and white candy-striped barricades that are supposed to keep the public separated from the revelers. My friend and I decided to walk next to them. As we continued along the route the mob of people behind the barricade grew dispersing everything that stood its way. The cops were called in to keep the mob behind the barricade. As the parade turned its final corner on to what is known to locals as the 'last lap' the mob became so big that they burst through the barricade and joined the revelers in the celebration. The cops couldn't hold us back. By this time, I was part of the jam session. We were piled on top of each other like sardines in a tin. The heat was intense. There were bodies all over and people were swinging their hands all over the place. The soles of my shoes were wasted. There were people with their kids on their shoulders. Sweat was dripping from my forehead. Sweaty bodies were rubbing upon each other. There was a mixed scent of salt, liquor and perspiration in the atmosphere. The police couldn't control the crowd anymore. In an effort to contain the mass, they started to jam along in the front and the side in the form of a human chain. The police were also chipping. When we arrived at the end of the route and the police indicated the jam was over, the Mighty Rusty started singing, '*crowd a people do you want this jam to stop?*', by which the crowd replied '*hell no*', He continued, '*Crowd a people, do you want this jam to stop?, hell no*' then he went again, '*crowd a people do you want this jam to stop?, hell no*'. Then he instructed us to then '*stamp in, stamp out, stamp in, stamp out*'. We continued jamming with the band, without permission. A police official continued waving his hand and instructing the band to stop. The driver of the truck stopped for a while, but the crowd insisted we keep on going. I

remember jamming, for at least, another hour just a few kilometers further down the street until we entered another venue, the Old Boxing Stadium. There we continued jamming until the band was tired. The next day on a popular radio program, police as well as some carnival revelers expressed their disapproval at what had transpired the day before.

Coming from a pretty conservative background as discussed earlier where it was not customary to engage in this type of so called ‘lawless’ behavior in public, what I did was very odd. What triggered my actions? Was it the density of the crowd, the heat, the lack of oxygen, the inability to escape easily, the grinding *boomsies* [buttocks] the chipping feet, the sweat and the smell of salty perspiration and undeodorized armpits, folks under the influence of rum and whisky, my hurting feet, my age, the dance, or was it a combination of all of the above? Just maybe there was a connection (different than what I previously thought) between the lyric and Calypso-Roadmarch; but this time with a different effect when compared to the lyric and Critical-Calypso. Maybe if we look into the song that the band was playing we might better comprehend what happened.

The song that had everyone defying the orders of the police and *breakingaway* was entitled Tighter. It was a song about a woman who is what locals call ‘*big boneded*’, a term used in the English Caribbean for ‘full’ women. This woman was independent and not ashamed asking Mighty Rusty to dance. Mighty Rusty complied but did not realize that he was dealing with a woman who had ‘supernatural’ powers. She casts a spell on him and put him under her trance. She took on the role of a plump devilish vampire that wanted his blood for her satisfaction. The only way she could achieve this was by holding on as tight as she could to her victim, and suffocating him. Mighty Rusty sang:<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Track # 23 verse 1 on YouTube channel

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjZkZyYy8Al\\_t4iOIfkhk7Yg](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjZkZyYy8Al_t4iOIfkhk7Yg)

*A woman with plenty flesh round she navel,  
 invite a man like me to come dance,  
 and I so horny and ready to party,  
 I lose my head I fall in a trance,  
 then I realize, that this woman  
 had some very serious intention,  
 grab on to me waist like a devil,  
 seeking for blood and some satisfaction,  
 I couldn't get away, no way,  
 the woman like a virus on me all day,  
 I couldn't get away, no way  
 Rusty 'I love you is what she say'  
 (Chorus)  
 tighter, she begging, fo more  
 had me wrestling down on di floor,  
 tighter, she start to insist  
 I could hardly wait, I ain't had time to resist,  
 tighter a jam in she waist,  
 and both me knee jam in she face,  
 she started to ball,  
 a could hardly breathe a wanted to fall*

Psychoanalyst Dimitri Halley, whom I referenced earlier, shared with me that the lyric should not be completely seen as separate from the action; 'words were symbols and symbols had power'.<sup>103</sup> He told me that a key for understanding my actions on that day could possibly be found in the etymology of the word *canta*. He says:

*Canta* means to sing in Papiamentu. It comes from the word incantation. When a calypsonian is challenging, or singing about someone they would say '*e ta cantabo*'. *Canta* comes from the Latin term *cantāre* which means to chant upon in song. This chant perhaps may be a magical spell or a hymn of praise. What the '*big boneded*' woman was maybe doing to Mighty Rusty was actually putting him under a spell with her dance. By him singing this song for the mob her chant and spell were possibly transferred to crowd.

Whether this was the case or not, in some circles this would seem farfetched, it certainly was an indication of how many in Aruba, have given meaning to events that they could not explain with

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<sup>103</sup> Dimitri Halley (Jungian psychoanalyst), in discussion with the author in late 2008 at the University of Aruba. The interviewee specializes in dreams and symbols.

traditional Western logic, by referring to ‘powers’ beyond the physical realm. Explanations that included the spiritual are never too far from any conversation and have been part of our daily vocabulary, whether it is a house or street haunted by a *jumbie*, *diables*, *chupacabra* or the ‘enemy’ preventing someone from achieving success in their lives. People might advise you to bathe in ‘blue soap’ to ward off ‘evil spirits’ or they might even tell someone to ‘*stop putting mouth on me*’ or ‘*stop salting me up*’ to prevent bad luck.<sup>104</sup> When it rains while the sun is shining, we might say that ‘*the devil beating he wife*’. I must say that even though many considered it so-called *bijgeloof*, as the Dutch would say, it was still part of our everyday existence as evidenced by our thoughts and ‘talk’. Reality of the matter is that the physical and spiritual realm is very much experienced as porous in our societies. As is the next case.

### The Baron and ‘*Jumbie*’ (2004)

A decade later, I had another noteworthy experience. This time it took place in the Joe Laveist Sports Park in 2004 when the band called NBO (No Breaks Organization) was performing. The singer was the aforementioned The Baron. This is how I remember this experience.

I recall standing in a jam packed Sportpark stadium with my girlfriend. I was in Aruba doing research on the Aruban carnival in 2005. After having not been at a Calypso Festival for more than 8 years, I was back in the stadium. I remember the towering white lights shining down on the entire crowd. The stands were also filled to capacity. The NBO band had already performed several songs that were pretty good, but nothing extraordinary. It was somewhat of a flat night. My feet were hurting from standing so many hours on the same spot. The weather was hot and the atmosphere was sticky because of the amount people crammed in one a small area. When the last singer, The Baron, came on stage this all changed. He was wearing a long black undertaker jacket. He wore a black hat and gloves like Michael Jackson. In the background you heard the sounds of ghosts [*jumbies*] moaning. It sounded like high and low ‘whooooooooo, whooooooooo, whoooooooooooo’. It created a sort of anticipation. On stage there were more jumbies dancing with him instructing the crowd what to do. Their faces were painted

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<sup>104</sup> Caribbean versions of: *Jumbie* [zombie], *diables* [female devil], *chupacabra* [demonic goat-sucker]

with white paint, and their eyes were black as the night. Their clothes were ripped, and faces covered with grime from having been six feet under for so long. The Baron said 'Rise Up Aruba'. Then he said 'go left, follow the jumbie, go right follow the jumbie'. The entire crowd was going left and right as he commanded us too. It was as if he transformed us into jumbies. We were doing exactly what the jumbie instructed us to do. There was a collective heat in the park as we moved back and forth. After the performance, I looked over at my girlfriend and said, what was that? It's as if we didn't know what overcame us. There was a definite energy there and everyone in the park, knew this as well by their reactions. Not even the applause was ordinary. Instead of the usual kind of applause that says 'that was great performance', the applause after this performance seemed more to say, 'what the heck was that?'

The song he was performing was called *Jumbie*. *Jumbie* is a word commonly used in the Caribbean to refer to a 'dead spirit' roaming around us mortals (Robert 2012, 11-12). It is comparable to a 'zombie' elsewhere. It should be mentioned that this song was performed in 2004, several years prior to Trinidadian soca star Machel Montano's version of *Jumbie*. Baron's song talks about a *jumbie*, who, after so many years of being buried under the ground, hears that they would be soon celebrating 50 years of carnival in Aruba. He yearns to come and dance at carnival, that the *jumbie* starts turning in his grave. He eventually rises up out of the ground and starts to dance, 'Michael Jackson style'. He orders everyone to follow him as he goes left and right and as he spins around.

The song goes as follows:<sup>105</sup>

*Shake and shout, yeah yeah,  
jumbie come back to jam,  
shake and shout, yeah yeah,  
jumbie come to jam  
50 years of playing mass,  
jumbie want to get a dance,  
although he down in a box,  
jumbie want to get a wuck,  
jumbie turning in he grave,  
jumbie just want to jam,*

<sup>105</sup> Track # 24 verse 1 on YouTube channel

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjZkZyYy8Al\\_t4iOlfkhk7Yg](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjZkZyYy8Al_t4iOlfkhk7Yg)

*jumbie turning in he grave,  
 jumbie just want to dance,  
 jumbie turning in he grave,  
 look di jumbie buss out of he grave  
 (chorus)  
 follow di jumbie, follow di jumbie left go left,  
 follow di jumbie, follow di jumbie right, go right,  
 hands up, down*

As the Baron performed this pretty simple song in typical ‘call and response’ fashion, he had everyone in his grip. It’s as if he literally became the *jumbie* and put the crowd in a trance. As he said ‘go left, go left’, the crowd of about ten thousand followed him without reservation. As he said ‘turn around’ the crowd massively followed suit. It was as if the Baron became the master who held sway over the entire crowd who were in a trance-like state similar to a techno-shamanist.<sup>106</sup>

After hearing different versions of what the *breakaway* is like, I sat down with the Baron himself, one of the foremost Roadmarch-Calypso performers, to find out what he thought and what went into his productions on stage.<sup>107</sup> I needed to speak to the ‘*Jumbie* man’ himself as his email address indicated.

The Baron has been in the calypso world for over 20 years and his band members have won many titles. He has written winning Critical-Calypsos for Lady K and for Lady V. He has also composed winning Roadmarch-Calypsos for calypsonians The Hammer and Mighty Hippy. His band NBO is known for making up-tempo Roadmarch-Calypsos that get the crowd hyped. The Baron has also been known for his electric style of performing and his command over the crowd.

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<sup>106</sup> A cultural movement combining technology, electronic dance music and spiritual or religious elements.

<sup>107</sup> The Baron, interviewed by the author, July 11, 2011, Aruba (at his home). We had many conversations thereafter.



I met him at his home studio one morning. I had spoken to him various times but never in the context of a formal interview. The Baron impressed me with his magnetic smile. He had a low fade and two brightly shining diamond studs in his ears that caught the eye. The Baron struck me as a confident man, who seemed self-assured in his business. I wanted to know more about his performance style and the way he got the crowd to *breakaway*. He told me:

*When you playing for the crowd, people don't make no joke. You have to come good. I had some bad experiences in the past where I didn't have the right equipment to play. The speakers we had was all waste up because we had played for the jouvert morning the night before. The people in the jouvert was happy but the next day during the parade the speakers sounded bad. 'Boof, boof' was the sound coming of the speakers during the big parade. I never get so much cuss off in ma life. The carnivalistas call me all kind a names. Since then I never play for jouvert anymore. I realize that the people who jamming with us is serious people and they come to have a good time. That good time I have to provide with my band. My philosophy when it comes to singing is that the people are active and doing something. Some people like the slower beat but I want to keep the crowd rocking. They have to feel the spirit, they have to feel the magic. The only way I could do that is if I let them do something. They have to feel the heat. If you playing a slow Roadmarch-Calypto and the people only chipping that looking bad on camera. People like to see movement, action, spectacle. The thing is it all have to do with synchronization. When you see a massive amount a people doing the same movement it looks nice for the eye. In my carnival group as well at our performances on stage we always have groups in front getting the crowd involved. We always want to put on a show. Last year we come with something different where we had girls in costumes dancing on the trailer. This was never done before. It was supposed to shock and aw. When the crowd come to the park they come to see a show. So that is why you have to give it to them. When I perform jumbie I know what the effect was going be. I had that song in the bullpen for a while. It was going to be a big bomb. That's why I save it for carnival fifty. The dancers there also help make the effect bigger.*

It seemed to me that The Baron knew exactly how big dancing crowds function. Without an in-depth psychoanalysis, he seemed to know that if large crowds acted in unison there was a bigger effect and there was more power. Furthermore, although he never mentioned preparing a ritual, he interestingly used the words 'spirit' and 'magic' when he was talking about getting the crowd involved. He wouldn't call it a spell as such but the execution thereof had people behaving a certain way. He made sure all of his equipment was just right. The speakers, the amplifier, the

drums, the costumes and the songs. Everything had to fall in place. Again, psychoanalyst Dimitri

Halley had a very interesting take on the role of the Roadmarch-Calypso singer. He said:

The Roadmarch-Calypso singer is much like the Shaman, he's running the show. The people willfully give themselves up to be taken over by the Shaman. Roadmarch-Calypso music is very simple. The reason that it's simple and repetitive is to put people in a trance. It's just like in some religions. You keep on repeating the same thing all the time. That is to induce the out of body experience.

Vira, an attendee of the local Pentecostal church, as you can imagine had another take on this song. When she heard it on the airways she said:<sup>108</sup>

*This carnival thing is the devils work. By making a song about a dead spirit [jumbie] coming back to earth, that mean that you calling on evil spirits to possess the crowd. The singer self becoming like that the evil spirit and casts a spell on the crowd. This chant is not a blessing but rather a curse. What a lot a people don't understand is that the devil does use roadmarch to entrap the people and let them do things against the will of God. Carnival is a festival of the flesh. This is against God's will. God does tell us renounce the flesh. You ain't find it strange that only in carnival people can break the law and nobody ain't saying nothing about it. People peeing out in public, dressing half naked, public drunkenness, sex all over the place. That ain't God's work, that's the devil talking there boy. What The Baron is doing is very dangerous. You know that the bible tells us that the tongue is very powerful. You could either bless somebody or curse them. When somebody curse with demons they going be doing all type of bad things. That jumbie song is a curse.*

In my interview with Chantelle, another carnival reveler, chose to differ in opinion from those who claim that these Roadmarch-Calypso singers cast spells on their audiences.<sup>109</sup> She thought it was an exaggeration and that one should not blame everything on so called dark forces. She adopted a position, where it came down to personal choice and saw how people behave as related to their approach to life and less to the metaphysical. She said:

*The people them who saying carnival and Roadmarch-Calypso from the devil exaggerating. When anybody jamming it's of their own doing. Nobody ain't forcing them to do nothing. In everything got good and got bad. You just have to make that choice. If*

<sup>108</sup> Vira Gupta's remarks in a churchyard conversation in 2004, San Nicolas Aruba.

<sup>109</sup> Chantelle Rover's post Calypso Festival remarks in a conversation at her home in March 2004, San Nicolas Aruba.

*you go on thinking everything bad and everything is voodoo you won't have any fun in life. Tha mean you going be lock in your house 24/7 waiting for the Lord to come. We should enjoy weself in life but it has a limit. When you jamming in a last lap band or in jouve morning is a sweet experience. You got a chance to free up yourself from all the stresses from the year. That's it. Nobody ain't dead from a lil wining. When these gials them does be getting reckless and getting carnival baby, is they own fault. It have to do with choices and they own upbringing. If you ain't raise right, then you go get these type a things. No damn calypsonian got me in no spell, I self choose to do that. These church people and thing giving the devil too much credit.*

### T-Money and 'Friends and Family' (2006)

The calypso elders and much of the calypso world in Aruba mention several Roadmarch-Calypso performances that went above and beyond the usual. One song that they always mention is a Roadmarch-Calypso entitled 'For Fans Only', more commonly known by Arubans as 'Friends and Family' which was sung by T-Money.

T-Money is one of the most popular Roadmarch-Calypso singers of his generation but, interestingly enough, has never won the Calypso Festival title.<sup>110</sup> From the overall comments and the crowd reactions it is clear that he is the sentimental favorite in part based on his humility. He is the people's uncrowned king, so to speak. His songs, written primarily by Black Diamond, have often times been the most popular on the road during the parades. Officially, within the Calypso Festival, he has not fared so well. The carnival revelers, especially those from *pariba*, have deemed him and his band Le Groove, 'The Kings of the Road' because of their role as pioneers in Aruba's carnival and their willingness to serve as a public voice for the people of San Nicolas.

Some of T-Money's friends have told me that he had a very difficult childhood. He grew up in the Village, just as Mighty Tattoo and Young Quicksilver, a working class, even poor

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<sup>110</sup> In 2018 he won is first crown.

neighborhood in San Nicolas near the gate of the oil refinery. Essentially abandoned by his parents, he was forced to fend for himself. During his childhood, he sometimes slept under cars. He would go to school with ripped T-shirts, worn-out shoes, and his hair uncombed. Almost everyone I spoke to about T-Money had a story about him. They said that growing up he was a ‘bad boy with no discipline, but he had changed his life through Roadmarch-Calypso’. ‘He has a gift’, someone another musician from the Village said, ‘they say nothing good comes out of the village but T-Money proved them wrong’. Ironically as the story goes, it was a blind person that discovered T-Money’s talent for singing. Somehow, he knew that he would make his mark and would become a ‘rose that blooms in the concrete jungle’ so to speak.

Over the course of my many conversations with calypso aficionados, I somehow got the feeling that there might be a connection between the sentimentality of his friends and family knowing his life story and the events that transpired on stage; thus, linking the *breakaway* with other factors as well. About his childhood, T-Money had this to say in an interview:<sup>111</sup>

*It was tough, it was tough, net [just] in the seventies going in the eighties it had the drugs just had start, to, to how you say, penetrate in the village. My mother and my father was on drugs, literally I see that as a positive way for me to, to grow. To see that when I seeing them going astray to doing that, it don't make no sense, I say no, I can't, I can't do that and that what makes, it, it made me really you could say a man before my time. And the singing did really what change my life too because, it put me in a different environment, it take me out of the negative environment and going to positive.....The one that I sing means the most to me was 'Friends and Family' I sitting down there what wrong with these people them sitting down there on the road crying, really like tears. The song is a very touchy song, it got a lot of sentimental feelings in it and that what touch them at the beginning. My uncle had me on his shoulder with the whole stage cover up and you ain't seeing no band members at all, only the crowd. Oh Lord that was so nice, that was such a nice picture, oh that was pretty and then from there I like, yeah for true, this, this really touch them....Man when I step out on stage I go in a whole different world, I'm in a whole different world. I, I'm in dreamland, I think, for me is dreamland I*

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<sup>111</sup> T-Money interviewed by Sharelly Emanuelson, *Mighty Lords, Kings and Queens: Calypso and the politics of recognition*, 2015, <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/mlkq2015>

*think, being there for that six minutes that your singing is incredible. It ain't have no words to describe it.*

These are the lyrics of 'Friends and Family' (For Fans Only)<sup>112</sup>

*I got reasons, to come back to sing every year 'cause  
 Me fans is me Family, me fans is me friends darling  
 I just cannot let them go, no way  
 I got reasons to come and perform every year boy  
 Me fans is me Family, me fans is me friends darling  
 I just cannot let them go, no way  
 Every time D' band play ye ready to breakaway you 'ne care  
 What D' hell people say  
 Every pan knock, ye asking: who playing? You ain't care what  
 Church keep, you going. Ye grooving, we grooving  
 Cause you like me family, me fans is me family, I just cannot let  
 You go so I singing  
 Le, le, lo, le, lo, Le Groove on D' road for sure, for sure and  
 everyone know, know, know is time to jump up, jump up high  
 jump up higher in D' sky singing 2X  
 Ready for the Breakaway, The Breakaway  
 for D' jouve, i see them wucking up in D' band, i see them wucking up [wucking up]  
 in D' parties, i see them wucking up in D' band, i see them wucking up  
 like pen on paper, i see them wucking up in D' band, i see them wucking up  
 i see them all over, i see them wucking up in D' band, i see them wucking up  
 you 'se me fans, you 'se me supporters, you 'se me friends  
 all of you like family 2X*

Again, the lyrics of the song were not complicated and the musical arrangement was not exceptional, yet it still opened up a space for possible *jouissance* beyond the normal for many. It was a mellow song, with a relaxed beat, yet it conjured up so much emotion. When you speak to witnesses, they say 'it was something they have never experienced before'. Some say it was even spiritual. One of T-Money's friends told me, 'they got goosebumps', during the performance. It was as if something 'engulfed' them and 'swept' them away. It was 'surreal' one of the witnesses said; 'everyone in the venue was taken aback by it'.

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<sup>112</sup> Track # 22 verse 1 on YouTube channel

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjzKzZyYy8Al\\_t4iOIfkhk7Yg](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjzKzZyYy8Al_t4iOIfkhk7Yg)

Van de Port (2006) refers to comparable experiences as ‘the kick’ where he shows examples of how parachutists, bungee jumpers, rock climbers, (even) rapists speak of forces beyond themselves having a hand in the events that transpire. He speaks of an interruption to ‘truth’ beyond one’s orchestration. Seemingly there was an ‘interruption of truth’ during T-Money’s performance.

Content wise this song focused on the love that he had for his fans, friends and family, despite *never* being accepted by the mainstream discourse of SAC. This song was an ode to his supporters because they have never stopped believing in him. In a sense, he was headed for destruction, but he overcame that and now, they were there to share this evening with him. It is similar to drug addict giving a testimony in church or an alcoholic sharing their small successes in the circle at an AA meeting.

The moment this T-Money’s *breakaway* was experienced was in the semifinal of the Calypso Festival which took place in a venue other than the mainstage. I was not present, as I was in the Netherlands at the time, but remember listening to comments from radio DJ’s on internet radio, that they had never seen anything like that since the 1985 performance by Mighty Cliffy. They were telling the listeners that this performance would be a sure winner on the final night. Interestingly enough, in front of a massive crowd and in the larger venue, the song did not have the same effect, there was no *kick* and ironically did not win the festival. It was *nice*, perhaps there was feeling of *plaisir*, it felt good, but there was no *jouissance*. The song placed second.

## The *Breakaway* as resistance against Narratives of the One Happy Island

We have gotten a glimpse throughout the text of some of the characteristics and the inner workings of the *breakaway* and what might be *jouissance*; under which circumstances it might occur, the role of the drum and dance, the significance or insignificance of lyrics, the different opinions about it among the population, some views by revelers and non-revelers, the mystery of the metaphysical, and yet the question remains: how does the *breakaway* actually encourage resistance, encourages the political and even more importantly, how does it make Narratives of the One Happy Island irrelevant?

As has been indicated throughout the text, Critical-Calypso has been analyzed by academics as ‘resistance music’, or as music that is capable of deconstructing dominant discourses by the elite. But the relationship between Roadmarch-Calypso and dominant discourses such as many Narratives of the One Happy Island has been almost completely eclipsed by that of Critical-Calypso. As illustrated for example at the beginning of this chapter in the words of Guilbault.

Besides being criticized as lacking in substance, not engaging the political, providing no added value and not being lyrical, Roadmarch-Calypso has been pigeonholed as part of the pop culture industry. Moreover, Roadmarch-Calypso seems to take place within a vacuum, in a specific period, in a sort of a ritualized ‘metasocial performance’ where basically anything goes, as it is part of the liminal ritual. Roadmarch-Calypso is associated with pre-Lenten carnival, which many argue is not reflective of the real world in Aruba. Some have described these events, as we will see, as a time for orchestrated ‘licensed transgression’. The critique embedded in Bakhtin’s carnivalesque *inversion* notion, is that it doesn’t offer ‘real’ resistance, but in fact

reinforces the marginalized position of the poor and working class. For example, we see,

Umberto Eco assert that,

... the essential conservatism of carnival in that it reinforces the status quo by functioning as a filter of subversive impulses. ...carnival has historically been used as a means to stifle popular revolt, and suggests that it continues to be so used, inasmuch as the mass media operate a 'continuous carnivalization of life' that substitutes pleasure for politics. (Eco 1994, 6)

Diouf and Nwankwo demonstrate how Afro-Atlantic music has been used as a commodity by the dominant classes to exploit the poor and working class, thus strengthening their grip on society.

<sup>113</sup> They say:

In the most recent of era of financially driven flows of culture and peoples within and among the nations of the Atlantic, Afro Atlantic music and dance have become prime commodities. As economic commodities, they fatten the bank accounts of multinational media companies and well positioned artists. (Diouf & Nwanko 2010, 2)

Despite these arguments having some merit, they don't always hold up when one considers some of the premises and assumptions upon which these arguments are founded.

First of all, most of these arguments assume that people do not demonstrate 'agency' to counter, subvert, redirect and reformulate domination and to become drivers of their own destiny. Along my research journey I have found people to be great 'agents in the production of their own realities' as part of a sort of a 'creative eruption' as in the words of Nigel Rapport (Rapport & Overing 2000).

Also, I should note that one of the main characteristics of Anansism is what is known in the Anglophone Caribbean as '*play stupid*'. In other words, go along, while you do your own thing, with the understanding that your actions have multiple meanings when you give yourself permission to perform a creolized repertoire of multiple identities (Burton 1997). 'Yes master',

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<sup>113</sup> Much like Mass culture versus Popular culture is the distinction John Fiske makes. Mass culture being commodified and controlled by the dominant class and pop culture having its source in the community.



does not always mean ‘yes master’. Too many academic accounts of carnival in general and Roadmarch-Calypso in particular also assume that poor and working-class people of the Afro-Atlantic (which include peoples of African, Indigenous and European descent) are passive and have no ability to be ‘agents of change’. Afro-Atlantic peoples have historically always advanced their own political, economic, and cultural agendas, even in the most devastating circumstances (Guadeloupe 2009). These agendas have been varied, but one common thread has been the promotion of a life-seeking impulse deep in the entrails of a death-seeking imperial system.<sup>114</sup> The examples are numerous. Take the multiple voiced creole languages spoken in the Caribbean as an example, or the many syncretic religions and cultures that are very much alive in the Afro-Atlantic despite them being banned for long periods in our history (Allen 2012).

Second, the criticism by some calypso elders, specifically with regard to the depth, complexity and power of the Critical-Calypso versus, the shallowness, commercialism, simplicity, vulgarity and powerlessness of the Roadmarch-Calypso at times comes off as ‘intellectual elitism’. But in this instance, much of the elitism emanates from black and brown ‘Ebony Towers’ as it argues from the same elitist vantage point of for example ‘white academia’ so to speak, desperately trying to prove how Critical-Calypso is no different than that of Shakespeare or Dickens, while rejecting out of hand any serious consideration of music and dance for the masses, who, in their view, just follow like cattle, playing directly into the hands of the dominant classes.<sup>115</sup> They wrongly presuppose that ‘party music’, *musica di carnival*, and dance cannot engage the political.

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<sup>114</sup> For example, transatlantic slavery, East Indian indenturedship and Amerindian genocide.

<sup>115</sup> As opposed to Ivory Towers (academic system)

I argue instead that music and dance, such as that which constitutes Roadmarch-Calypso may embody a more devastating critique of dominant discourses such as the many of the Narratives of the One Happy Island than Critical-Calypso itself, by creating a space through ‘liminal advancement’ in *communitas* for the transfer of knowledge wisdom and creativity in ways that ‘symbolized *plaisir*’ cannot comprehend. As Michael Jackson has delineated this thesis in his work on ‘knowing through the body’. In other words, ‘spoken word’ was not the only means. Afro-Atlantic peoples have used music and dance to continuously represent and reinvent their multiple bases of identity-physically, emotionally, and intellectually (Diouf & Nwanko 2010).

Third, West African, Afro Atlantic and Amerindian forms of world making tend to avoid any distinction between the physical and the spiritual world, and any other assumptions based on a whole set of ‘supposed realms of difference’ that academics sometimes take for granted. Everard Phillips (1999) in his study on calypso and mediation, says any model for African centered mediation should take into account several key themes. Some examples:

The universe is a Cosmos, the ultimate nature of reality is spirit, the human being is organically related to everything in the universe, knowledge comes from participation in and experience of the Universe, Human relatedness is the practice of our humanity, participation in the Universe through a balance between the rational (cognitive left brain) and the intuitive (imaginative right brain). (Phillips 1999, 58)

Regardless if you agree with Phillips on the idea of a cognitive versus imaginative brain functions, what we can take away however is that Roadmarch-Calypso may seem to be a ‘licensed affair’ from a physical vantage point, but not from a vantage point that does not divide the physical from the spiritual. From a vantage point that integrates the spiritual with the physical, forces may be called upon to fight against the powers and principalities of some aspects of the Narratives of the One Happy Island so to speak. The argument is thus that ‘the licensed

affair' has more merit perhaps on a symbolized level as it does not go beyond the dynamics of symbolization, and remains within the realm of vocabulary. A true *breakaway*, and *jouissance*, cannot be fully described and thus cannot be given form, only assumed. It could be argued that it is something which can never be orchestrated, controlled nor replicated by the dominant classes. As someone in Aruba told me, '*the devil is a copycat, not an original*'.<sup>116</sup> *Breakaway* thus in some important ways remains a mystery and cannot be fully categorized and domesticated.

Fourth, true *breakaway* and *jouissance* is not encouraged by the dominant classes as that would be an encouragement to enter a space where there is no 'symbolic domination' (Dalleo 2016). An argument can be made that it is the other way around, that *plaisir* type enjoyment is actually encouraged by the dominant classes and their Narratives of the One Happy Island through what Fiske (1989) calls Mass Culture. In carnival, 'pleasure' is scripted and controlled. There is even a 'limit' to 'permissible dissent' in a sense. There is a heavy police presence, a heavy set of restrictions established what you can and cannot do and how it should be done. The liquor and telecommunication companies are the ones, for the most part, who call the shots, with their unabashed commercialism. In this context, it cannot be said that people are not enjoying themselves, there is much fun to be had, but in this space, poor and working-class people are treated as if they are guilty before determined innocent, with the authorities being carefully instructed to intimidate 'these savages before they get out of hand'. The so called '*Faya bo haya*' zero tolerance policy during Carnival in Aruba, sends a clear message that, if you step out of line, even if it's a minor infraction, the authorities have the right to incarcerate you and charge you a heavy fine. You are only allowed to experience *plaisir* behind the barricade, so to speak. If you jump over it, things become messy.

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<sup>116</sup> The devil/evil is here a figurative representation of the dominant classes.

Aruban *jouvert* revelers always wonder why the *jouvert-morning* jump up is always under scrutiny. The SAC often engages in discussions with the police aimed at banning the *jouvert-morning* parade, or significantly reducing the timeframe. Arguing that these parades encourage violence and lawlessness. The police have also expressed their desire to change the hours, so that they would finish earlier, and not go on until the sun comes up in the morning, as is the tradition. The headline in the online news website 24ora.com on Wednesday February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012 read ‘*Polis cu peticion na SAC pa cambia orario di J’ouvert Morning y hacie 12’or di anochi*’ [the police with a petition to SAC to change the hours of the *jouvert-morning* to 12 at night]. Some of the reactions were:

*Ban mira Trudy (police commissioner). Laga di ta neck. Haci nos e favor y no mishi cu e tesoronan di carnaval. J’ouvert morning ta j’ouvert morning y no midnite-show. Ta con cos ta porfin. Ta polis kier haci donjo di Aruba su carnaval? Polis miho bo prepara bo mes pa temporada di carnaval. Awor si ta bon.*

[Common Trudy (police commissioner). What the heck. Please do us a favor and do not mess with our treasures of carnival. *Jouvert-morning* is *jouvert-morning* and not a midnight show. How is it actually? Do the police want to become the boss of Aruba’s carnival? The police should prepare themselves better for the carnival season].

Another reaction was,

*Hopi pica con SAC ta cabando cu tradishon di Aruba y San Nicolas en especial. Tecla (the president of the carnival committee) ta hopi anti San Nicolas, den pasado e hasta kier a pone Calypso y Roadmarch contest na Playa, y Jouvert Morning na Playa. Awor kier cambia horario tambe. Polis nunca sa tende di shift? Bo ta casi anjela e tempo di Milo Croes, of kier pa Canaval wordu dirigi pa Gobierno.*

[What a pity, to see how SAC is finishing with our tradition in Aruba and in San Nicolas in particular. Tecla (the president of the carnival committee) is very much anti San Nicolas, in the past they actually wanted to put Calypso and Roadmarch contest in town and *jouvert morning* in town. Now they want to change the time. The police, never heard of shift hours? You even almost wish for the days of Milo Croes (former president of the SAC) or even for the carnival to be run by the government].

John Fiske’s account of aesthetic powers being a threat and thus being dominated by the authorities helps us to understand the tension expressed in these polemics:

Anything out of control is always a potential threat, and always calls up moral, legal, and aesthetic powers to discipline it. The signs of the subordinate out of control terrify the forces of order ... for they constitute a constant reminder of both how fragile social control is and how it is resented; they demonstrate how escaping social control, even momentarily, produces a sense of freedom. (Fiske 1989, 69)

In a sense, the only way the dominant classes could do anything was by attempting to discipline the body, or as they say in much of the Caribbean, 'give it *licks*', beat it, and repress whatever posed a threat.

Fifth, most criticism of Roadmarch-Calypso doesn't take agency on an individual level into account like for example of the artist. During carnival, these Calypso Mighties, Lords, Kings and Queens are catapulted into a space of power, from which they would normally be excluded. Carnival gives the so called 'Poets of the Ghetto' referring to calypsonians in general, a platform from which their voices can be heard. As a performer of Roadmarch-Calypso, the singer has the power to enthrall thousands of people in the crowds. That is a definite threat to certain versions of the Narratives of the One Happy Island. It becomes even more profound when this power transverses or migrates beyond the carnival season and Ash Wednesday.

Natalie Zemon Davis (1975, 143) talks about carnival 'spilling over' and not being able to be 'contained', thus giving rise to a larger movement of sorts. Take the example of calypsonian Black Diamond and his so called anti-establishment 'Pink for Life Movement' which has over 8000 Facebook followers, including most politicians, who closely monitor his statements. By his account, he has had politicians call him 'begging him' to stop criticizing the government. It is through Roadmarch-Calypso that he has gained this celebrity, this power where he now has a platform to speak, in part on behalf of the people from *pariba*. Thus, his use of Roadmarch-Calypso as a pop culture is used as a vehicle for political engagement. His followers

were not maybe actively commenting on or engaging in political matters but actively participated on his platform in the exchange of ideas that were perhaps even more far reaching.

T-Money's story of overcoming poverty and abandonment is essentially another reason why it is not entirely correct to portray the carnivalesque as merely a 'licensed affair' dominated by the dominant classes very much like classic Marxist thinking. For that kind of framing does not take into account the personal agency that the so called less privileged display during carnival, discovering 'their' potential, 'their' power, 'their' ability to make things happen in what normally what would be considered the ordinary. It opens up spaces for self-discovery and self-development in a sense, a 'fleeting moment of freedom' found from within, as in the case of T-Money (Dumm 1999,16-17). It has given T-Money a voice and a position of power beyond the carnival period. He now works as a prison guard, while under other circumstances he would likely be on the other side of those iron bars. Many youngsters see him as a role model and say 'if he can make it, I can make it also'. The talented up and coming Roadmarch-Calypso singer Blacky, is one of his biggest admirers and even emulates T-Money's voice when he performs. Blacky is now one of the premier Roadmarch-Calypso performers.

Sixth, many have shown agency in encouraging the *breakaway* and possibly *jouissance* experiences beyond the pre-Lenten carnival. In the past, it would have been a major 'sin' if Roadmarch-Calypso were to be played during and beyond Lent. One DJ told me that radio listeners would call in and say '*den cuaresma no ta momento pa toca musica di carnival*' [during Lent is not the right time to play carnival music]. In Aruba today, weddings, birthdays, holy communions or any other party often end with a Roadmarch-Calypso set, by popular demand, thus breaking religious and traditional taboos. People have become agents in finding new spaces to truly express themselves and seek *jouissance* on their own merit. In a sense, they have become

agents in making the carnivalesque transversal, not tied to a season, but a mode that is continuous, that they can participate in whenever they choose. Roadmarch-Calypso singer, The Baron said that even after playing ‘salsa, merengue of world-famous Elvis Crespo and Marc Anthony the whole night at an upper-class party, when the party is ending people still come and say, ‘*please cabe cu carnaval*’ [please finish it with carnival music].<sup>117</sup>

Arubans have taken on a more active role in using Roadmarch-Calypso to subvert particular Narratives of the One Happy Island while creating another such narrative. In 2015 a group of concerned citizens of *pariba*, decided to organize their own *jouvert-morning* parade in The Village, with their own instruments, pots, pans and other kitchen utensils with no involvement of the authorities. Similar movements have been taking place throughout the Caribbean diaspora communities in Europe and in North America, especially amongst the younger generations who are forming so called ‘Soca posses’. There is also a subculture of mostly young people who join a ‘crew’ that goes from carnival to carnival, throughout North America and Europe, be it Caribbean style carnivals in Rotterdam, Notting Hill, Hoogstraten, Berlin, Toronto, New York, Miami from *fete to fete*, with a mission to keep the *breakaway* going. They are not for the most part confined by the limits of the seasonal calendar and not limited by language, race, country of origin, religion, gender and sexuality. The only thing that matters is if you can ‘*wine*’ to the music. An example of this in the Netherlands is the Dutch Soca Lovers or DSL crew. Speaking with one of the organizers of the DSL crew he told me that,

...we encourage people from all backgrounds to join the crew. We rent busses, from Amsterdam to London, to Berlin and different cities in the Netherlands to soca fetes. Most people are from Aruba and St Martin but we have plenty persons from Surinam, Netherlands, Dominican Republic, Ghana, Curaçao and many other places.

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<sup>117</sup> The Baron, interviewed by Sharelly Emanuelson, *Mighty Lords, Kings and Queens: Calypso and the Politics of recognition*, 2015, <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/mlkq2015>

In a DSL promo video, tellingly in front of a café named Break Away, a member by the name of Angie Eguren from the Dominican Republic living in the Netherlands tells her story.<sup>118</sup>

I'm a DSL.... We went together to a party in Belgium, we were there with Bunji Garlin, and Fayan Lyons, it was amazing, the energy that you get there, is amazing. It is like when we are together we are like a big family and I'm from the Dominican Republic and I don't have no family here and when you are with them, you feel like the love, the warmth that you get back home, you go to a party, it's not like a t-shirt that you where, you are wearing like a ring that your grandpa gave you, and then you are like, we belong together. We are from the same family, if something happen to you, then it also happen to me. And I am somebody that loves to dance, and I love family. DSL is a big family. It's a big family and everybody's welcome, it does not matter, it doesn't matter, where you are from, which color you are, it doesn't matter. The only that matters, is the love for Soca.

DSL crew has chosen a philosophy that is likened to Celia Cruz's *La vida es un Carnaval* or to the title of Kees Dieffenthaler's (Kes) and David Rudder's, 'Live your life like yuh playing mas [carnival]', which says in part that<sup>119</sup>

*you need to keep in mind, when carnival done, and there's no more bump and grind, no costume in town, so please keep the unity, everyone is family, Indian, Black, White or Chinese, Ballhead or Rass, live yuh life like you playing mas.*

## Conclusion

Looking at the different *breakaway* experiences you see that it often took place in a collective even though in all likelihood it could also take place individually. In my observation there was definitely a liminal *rite of passage* experience after which one could refer to their stripes of belonging; stripes of being part of *we culture*; the realness of *pariba*; the true experience of Aruba's carnival so to speak. In this context reputation as well as one's memory was tied to it. The persons I spoke to always could recall this 'mystical experience' they went through many

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<sup>118</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8h1UcBlgh3g>

<sup>119</sup> Track # 25 verse 1 on YouTube channel

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjzKzZyYy8Al\\_t4i0Ifkhk7Yg](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI7cYSijRjzKzZyYy8Al_t4i0Ifkhk7Yg)



years ago, and they could describe it in detail and then, almost always, they say ‘*I can’t really put it in words*’.

Yet still we see that this particular notion of *jouissance* was not ‘uniform’ as it was not similar to televised hype for a Reality TV show where much of the production is still constructed while the cameras are rolling; or in an Idols/The Voice talent show where fans could vote and where in the end there is always a *winner* and a *loser* (Escoffery 2006). Also, for example a European football match where the writing was also on the wall so to speak; I would argue that it was to some degree (though not always) still designed to open the *possibility* of the occurrence of *jouissance*. In such cases the design was related to three options; either their team *won* the match, *lost* the match or *tied* the match (Pringle et al 2015). In the Roadmarch-Calypso *breakaway* version; even if *jouissance* was experienced they seemingly were not all under the same circumstances. It was distinct as during each of them, different circumstances seemed to have played a role in the process. Therefore, there is a danger, especially from the anthropological class, myself included, of speaking of *jouissance* as an all-encompassing uniform experience. In the case of Mighty Cliffy’s Road on Fire *breakaway* in 1985 we could wonder whether the rain had anything to do with it. Was the *breakaway* abetted by rainfall or maybe the other way around; thus, that the rain was caused by the *breakaway*; or maybe a combination of both with a dose of ‘free flowing drinks from the bar’.

In the case of Mighty Rusty’s Tighter and The Baron’s *Jumbee*, we could see that from the accounts and the experiences of those present that this supposed *jouissance* perhaps had something to do with the lyrics, synchronization and the imagological effects of the ‘Devil’ possessing a woman in wanting to ‘*wine*’ tighter on a man, or evoking some type of ‘possession’ of a ‘*jumbee*’ wanting to come back to ‘*jam*’ for Aruba’s 50 year carnival jubilee.

In the case of T Money's Friends and Family *breakaway*, it could have been because of his personal history and his relationship with his fans. The relationship between the singer and the fans, possibly evoked some deep-seated emotion that had been activated through which the proverbial 'genie was let out of the bottle'.

In my particular case, I was in a *jamsession* as a teenager and defied the calls of the police; perhaps it had to do with me and the crowd resisting the authorities and their repressive approach of our enjoyment; thus, there was a 'kick' in defying the authority type of *jouissance*; it was 'cool' to 'fuck the police'. In my case, it could also be that I found *jouissance* in defying my somewhat conservative upbringing.

We have also seen that the *breakaway* to be something that revelers are constantly seeking but does not always happen; it is sparse and it does not appear on demand. In my interactions with those who said they had experienced a 'true' *breakaway*, it seemed to be somewhat of a rarity, but not impossible to achieve. In the examples above we see personal, geographical, spiritual, physical, biological, social, musical, lyrical, psychological factors all playing a role in evoking a *breakaway*, yet circumstances have to be just right, the stars must align, and still there is no guarantee it will happen.

Furthermore, we see that Roadmarch-Calypso and the *breakaway* represented a space that we can get a glimpse of and perhaps experience what it is like to be *truly human*. Contrary to the critics of Roadmarch-Calypso, this does not mean 'escapism' from the real world, but rather the other way around. I would say that, the structural functionalist lives we are living, actually represent our constant and norm-driven attempts to escape from being truly human. *Jouissance* is thus not an 'out of body experience' but the opposite. It is a rare moment when we give

ourselves permission (also without permission) to re-enter our bodies after prolonged periods of exile in the idealized normative phantom symbolic world after we have entered language.

In these rare moments of *jouissance*, the pre-constructed categories dissolve, pulling the rug from under all forms of hegemonic norms, including the Narratives of the One Happy Island. When there is real *breakaway* and *jouissance* there are no differences between *pariba* and *pabou*, black or white; LGBT and straight; or the rich and the poor, differences often exacerbated by Critical-Calypsonians. Perhaps this is the Real and True version of the One Happy Island. What you see on the ground is that, the Aruban crowd is constantly in search of this experience, even though they know that it might not always happen and that it does not last. But the quest to experience *jouissance* by means of the *breakaway* is a journey most Arubans are willing to take.

## Conclusion

### Back to *Jouvert-Morning*

#### Reflection:

I must tell you: it's been more than 20 years now since that first *jouvert-morning* experience described in the first chapter. As you can imagine, a lot has changed. I am married now with children, and I'm a college lecturer. I have to admit, attending the *jouvert-morning* this time around left me somewhat in a state of shock. At least, that was my initial reaction. The crowds seemed to have gotten much bigger. I saw scantily dressed, teenage girls, *breaking away*, or at least attempting to do so in lingerie, *wining* and *twerking* (an American version of *wining*) to the Roadmarch-Calypso basslines. I also saw men in nightgowns and curlers, in adult diapers sucking pacifiers. I saw muscular teenage boys, tattooed and covered in mud and white powder, intoxicated with a homemade alcoholic brew\_ ready to engage in *reckless* behaviour. Benontji, the millennial version of Juancito, was dancing at the head of the parade with a large straw hat and checkered shirt tied in a knot above his navel.<sup>120</sup> I also saw a large police presence, marines fitted in riot gear, and armoured vehicles. It made me think of scenes in Ferguson, Missouri and Baltimore, Maryland during the Black Lives Matter marches in the Unites States in 2015. The bands were constantly stopping and pleading with the '*malechornan*' [trouble makers] to stop the fighting. The ambulances, with their whooping sirens, were constantly driving up and down the street. I said to myself, 'this is crazy, violent, *grotesque!*' I thought, 'I cannot expose my kids to this debauchery'. I was acutely aware of my role as a teacher, a public figure, a husband, a father in a small society where basically everyone knows each other and in many instances\_related to one another. Then I shook my head and realised that 'hey' I was back in my structural, symbolic, judgemental mind set where the world had to fit a certain prototype, a specific version of the The One Happy Island. I had to snap out of it. I realised how quickly certain fixed thoughts could sneak up on you, like a thief in the middle of the night, or in this case, in the middle of *jouvert-morning*.

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<sup>120</sup> Juancito has been described in the opening vignette of the introduction as the flamboyant gay guy in my *jouvert* experience as a young teenager. Benontji in this passage is represented as the millennial version of Juancito. These are not the real names of these persons.

What I want to illustrate with this reflection above is that it did not matter how much of a ‘public intellectual’ I attempted to be, trying to shed light on ‘my’ culture and ‘my’ people so to speak. If I had not opened up, or at least attempted to experience the world, unencumbered by the traditional textual and the traditional oral, but by the sensorial - thus to touch, to feel, to hear, to smell, to dance, to *breakaway*, I would not have acquired the tools or developed the scope to carry out this study.<sup>121</sup>

### Summarizing the project

At the beginning of this ethnographic project I set out to paint a picture of the largely ignored calypso music world in the Dutch Caribbean, more specifically Aruba which up until now has only been touched upon to some degree by British Cultural Anthropologist Victoria Razak (1997) and Dutch Caribbean anthropologist Francio Guadeloupe (2008). I sought to shed light on the calypso controversy in Aruba. I discussed the much coveted Critical-Calypso; the slower, narrative driven, socially conscious and politically focused calypso. I noticed that this calypso has been lauded in most calypso studies as the ‘voice of the people’ or the ‘poor man’s newspaper’ (Hill. D 1993; Liverpool 2001; Rohlehr 1990; Warner 1985 *et al*). Yet I also noted, that for all of its power to engage with the dominant discourses in how Aruba describes itself, identified in this study as the Narratives of the One Happy Island, Critical-Calypso has its limitations. I argued that the very much enjoyed, yet much frowned upon, Roadmarch-Calypso, with its climactic *breakaway* herewithin deserved deeper, sholarly attention.

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<sup>121</sup> To make somewhat of a distinction between the ‘lyrical textual’ as in song text.

I found theoretical assistance in the thinking of Roland Barthes' notions of *plaisir* and *jouissance*. With his take on *readerly* [*lisible*] *text* and *writerly* [*scriptable*] *text* I found a good starting point for understanding the Critical-Calypso vis à vis Roadmarch-Calypso debate. Critical-Calypso showed family resemblances with *readerly texts* which can be described as a state of *plaisir* or pleasurable enjoyment. That is a passive enjoyment where for the most part the reader or in this case the listener just accepts the 'pre-packaged' message that the writer/calypsonian wants to convey. Roadmarch-Calypso showed a family resemblance to *writerly text*, imagined to being in a state of blissful enjoyment or *jouissance*. This is an active enjoyment that invites readers/listeners to become co-creators of the meanings conveyed by the writer/calypsonian, and invites readers/listeners to become creators of their own texts/song. I found the notion, dynamics of symbolization especially useful in helping me to articulate the notion of the Narratives of the One Happy Island. It provided me with a vocabulary to further accentuate the experiences underlying these two forms of calypso and how they engaged with dominant discourses in Aruban society. Last but not least, the notion of 'creolization' as theorized by Glissant and others helped me to navigate and make my academic contribution to an understanding of the specifics of Caribbean worldmaking.

Through personal interviews, song text analyses and observations, I portrayed Aruban calypsonians Mighty Talent and Black Diamond, arguably two of the most impactful calypsonians on Aruba over the last three decades, but who have adopted different approaches, especially to their Critical-Calypso experience, versus the many Narratives of the One Happy Island. I focused on their different calypso journeys up until now, their successes and their challenges and the changes they've made throughout the years.

In the end, I focused on the Roadmarch-Calypso experience, mainly through the descriptions of a number of case studies, including personal accounts and several Roadmarch-Calypso song texts from singers, such as Mighty Cliffy, the Baron, T-Money and Mighty Rusty. I have shown how Roadmarch-Calypso could trigger a possible *jouissance* through the *breakaway* which possibly made the idea of Narratives of the One Happy Island irrelevant.

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Having summarized this work, what remains are the main questions every researcher faces at the end of every journey, what is your contribution? In this specific case, what has my looking into the calypso controversy on Aruba done for this project and the field of anthropology? and what have these new ways of looking at calypso music, the symbolic, The Narratives of the One Happy Island, *plaisir*, the *breakaway* and *jouissance* actually showed?

As follows some pointed observations will be given in response to these questions.

### The Creole way

This dissertation has shown that the creole approach opens up much more possibilities for discovering how Arubans and people of the Caribbean make sense of the world. Despite its limitations as described in the chapter 3, the creole approach to Caribbean world making has allowed a space for deeper understanding of a musical genre that has traditionally been seen as simply 'Trinidadian', 'English Caribbean', 'the voice of the people' and as solely of 'African extraction'. In this work, I believe to have demonstrated some of the ways in which calypso

music has gone beyond the Anglophone Caribbean as it is now very much a part of the Dutch Caribbean and Hispanophone Caribbean.

I sought to demonstrate that the over reliance on plantation, plural society and postcolonial models to theorize the Caribbean as has been the case, despite its merits, runs the risk of perhaps ignoring new and different discoveries. For example, it has especially allowed for me to experiment with language usage and different reflexive approaches to my ethnography in this dissertation. Especially as it pertains to my writing style. Myself being pluri-lingual, as most Arubans, the creole approach has allowed me the space to present the larger complexities of Aruba and the Caribbean through a pluri-lingual lens. I argue that if this ethnography was only in ‘standard’ English, a lot would be ‘lost in translation’. By me presenting these narratives in ‘standard’ academic English, English Creole, Papiamentu, Dutch and Spanish I believe I have shed light on the way some Arubans made sense of their worlds from ‘their’ perspectives. Through the pluri-lingual English Creole dialogues and song texts presented throughout the dissertation, I attempted to activate the reader in what Barthes calls, ‘a *writerly* way’ as it was not pre-packaged

### The Danger of a Single Narrative

What we as anthropologists can also take away from this thesis is not placing too much emphasis on fixed conceptual labels when attempting to articulate a story. There is an eminent danger in reducing one’s story to a single narrative or dual narratives for that matter. I have learned that, that which we wish to shed light on is dynamic and ever-changing. Nothing is monolithic and most of the time we discover that the people whose stories we attempt to shed light on are, as



much as we ourselves, complex beings. There are many shades of grey, including contradictions and conflicts that need to be taken into account. It is therefore imperative that most calypso studies focus on the calypso world from a holistic perspective in which the traditional song text analysis coincides with examining the calypsonian as a person, not only a hero, thus look at who they are, how they grew up, their hopes, aspirations, their fears and shortcomings. One must also look at how they are viewed in society and their reactions. Being reflexive about -one's own worldview in relation to what is being studied plays a major part in this.

The stories of Mighty Talent and Black Diamond have taught me this well. Following their careers and lives over time has shown how they constantly evolved, reinventing themselves, continuously. In the process, they also had many narratives. The Calypsonian Black Diamond, the *bad john* calypso warrior, who initially demanded a strict *ingles* policy, and maintained an African retentionist notion of calypso had focused on a Trinidadian style of calypso by playing mostly what he called 'original soca' spawned two social movements; 'Back to the Roots' and 'Pink 4 Life', yet he was still confronted with plenty of challenges. To make sense of what he called the corrupt system he even adopted concepts such as The Matrix to prove that there were some invisible 'illuminati'-like powers dictating the mechanisms of ways of the world. He was almost Foucauldian in his recognition of the inherit corruption of 'power structures' to be found in all aspects of life. He also recognized that those in charge of these power structures determined the fate of all, and could deny him his livelihood and his children's chances of succeeding in life. After recognizing that he couldn't tackle 'the system' head on in a traditional Critical-Calypso sense, he had to look for alternatives. His choice to work for the government\_ the Matrix as he put it\_ was to help his daughter through medical school. He was a man of

principle, but he was also pragmatic, though some in the community would say hypocritical. It came down to a matter of picking his battles.

Mighty Talent, the *wunderkind*, has also recognized that the mechanisms of the many Narratives of the One Happy Island were so powerful that it would be nearly impossible to maintain a certain calypso tradition that he grew up within its ‘purest sense’, the Chocolate City-*weness-pariba* sense. Despite the pressures of the calypso elders and the folks in his hometown he recognized long before Black Diamond that one’s calypso message had to fit in the world which people lived. It wasn’t about ‘selling out’, it was about being pragmatic and ‘cashing in’ on his own success and on his own accord. He recognized the pressures of the Narratives of the One Happy Island to some degree, and also had to find ways to unsettle it without losing his livelihood. The ‘exaggerated codeswitching’ in his calypsos, and a balanced approach to his message was his way of including the entire population, both *pariba* and *pabou*. In reality, what you saw was that Mighty Talent and Black Diamond, even within these constraints, searched for ways to still maximize their potential while maintaining the Narratives of the One Happy Island status quo.

What their stories have demonstrated is that even if someone labels one or if one even labels themselves as a *bad john* Calypso warrior, African retentionist calypsonian, *mele-*calypsonian, pluri-lingual calypsonian and the like, this must always be viewed contextually and in passing.

The Transformative propensity of people

Which brings me to my next point, which coincides with the prior. This study has shown us the transformative propensity of people. This we have seen with the calypsonian, so too with the audience. This should be a reminder to us once we rigidly try to define the limitations of the human capacity, much like within dynamics of symbolization, it always comes up short. I would like to illustrate this in relation to a quote below.

Dimitri Halley, explains in the afterword of the publication *Calypso and Resistance in Aruba* that there is a price calypsonians pay for ‘telling the truth’.

Being a calypsonian/Anansi has its price. ... ‘when we bring the mote to the beam you get ousted’. In other words, when you show false people their true Self, they do everything in their power to eliminate you. This is perhaps the reason why the calypsonian as Anansi, is condemned and exiled to a ‘safe’ space like the calypso contest. It cannot go beyond the walls of the festival stadium. (Halley, in Richardson 2015, 99-11)

Halley’s assessment on calypso’s exile has originally also been my point of departure. However, what has been discovered is that luckily, calypso’s ‘condemnation’, and calypso’s exile to a ‘safe space’ has not been the final verdict for Arubans. It is precisely because of this encapsulation and limitation, which Mighty Talent and Black Diamond have experienced within the ‘safe place’ of Critical-Calypso, that people have explored and found new ways of subverting and deconstructing the dominant discourses of the elite.

What we can take away, especially with regard to the Roadmarch-Calypso and the *breakaway*, is that the Aruban population continuously showed much agency, as I have argued, transcending the so called ‘licensed transgression’ that some of the critics spoke about. They showed agency in looking for new ways to subvert the constraints of oppressive power laden constructs and even politics in society in *communitas* such as during *jamsessions*, parties and

non-carnival settings where they cannot wait but ‘demand’ for Roadmarch-Calypsos to be played, even in *cuaresma* [Lenten season] and beyond.

On an individual basis, it has given less privileged people, seemingly doomed from the initial stages of their lives, as in the case of T-Money, a voice and power to mobilize large crowds that could easily ‘spill over’ into revolt. Or perhaps on a spiritual level, through the dance, where spiritual warfare could be carried out against the powers and principalities of the dominant classes which are very much part of the local experience.

Through agency during the *breakaway* in Roadmarch-Calypso, the people of Aruba have proven time-and-time again their propensity to engage with and even challenge some of The Narratives of the One Happy Island in various aspects of their daily lives. It’s just that this time they took it to the streets, to the *fetes*, to the house parties and so on. Those who thought Critical-Calypso music was ‘dead and buried’ and who thought Roadmarch-Calypso music was the mindless ‘stupidification’, the ‘dumbing down’ of calypso perhaps were not recognizing what was going on, or weren’t looking in the right places. Roadmarch-Calypso was doing the same thing Critical-Calypso historically has done but in a different way and perhaps on a more profound level; this time while dancing and gyrating to the ‘sweet’ Roadmarch-Calypso tunes. It was Anansi, in both oppositional and accommodating typical trickster fashion, putting on the mantel of disguise as the opposition was taken into a different venue. Much of Critical-Calypso was so encapsulated by the symbolic, it became increasingly difficult to make any inroads as this space was so ‘impregnated with meaning’ in which the ‘temporary suspension of hierarchical distinction’ (Bakhtin 1984) could not hold true. The name *Road-march* is very telling as it was Critical-Calypso whom decided to *march*, away to the *road*, away from the symbolic dominant version of The One Happy Island, where it was free to *breakaway*.

### Perspectives on notions such as *plaisir* and *jouissance*

Lastly, one of the biggest takeaways of this study is gaining new insights on the way notions such as *plaisir* and *jouissance* are studied. If we go back to the original calypso controversy, and the arguments made throughout the text about the limitations of Critical-Calypso and the possibilities of Roadmarch-Calypso with regards to the deconstruction of the many Narratives of the One Happy Island, the impression that could be left is that Critical-Calypso and text is completely useless and rendered impotent. To this I say that we should not look at Critical-Calypso and *plaisir* on one side and the Roadmarch-Calypso, the *breakaway* and *jouissance*, on the other side in dualistic terms. If we did that, it would be no different than the binaristic frame of thought so common in the ways of seeing the world and this would not do the creole approach justice, whereas the creole space actually allows these possibilities.

As has been argued, Critical-Calypso music does a really good job attempting to deconstruct the dominant Narratives of the One Happy Island, but most of the time it is not successful because it does not question the dynamics of symbolization on which that narrative is based. Critical-Calypso *dents*, *beats*, *scratches* and *stretches* the conceivable *readerly* limits of permissible dissent to the utmost of symbolization, and is therefore seen as providing a foundation upon which Roadmarch-Calypso music and a real *breakaway* can possibly erupt into *jouissance*; and thus, by this experience automatically render the dominant and elitist versions of the Narratives of the One Happy Island irrelevant. In this process the crowd, as agents, enters into a dialogic and dialectical relation to the *writerly* Roadmarch-Calypso lyric which allows the participant to experience *jouissance* directly. For this reason, Roadmarch-Calypso music should not be seen strictly as separate from Critical-Calypso but rather as part of a process whereby the *plaisir* of the cerebral, mind-focused *readerly* Critical-Calypsonian lays the groundwork for the

*writerly* Roadmarch-Calypso *breakaway* obliteration of the symbolic mind-body binary and to the experience of *jouissance*.

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## Discography

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## Summary

Calypso music is one of the oldest and most recognizable genres to emanate from the Anglophone Caribbean. With global anthems such as ‘Feeling hot hot hot’ and popular folk classics such as the Banana Boat Song - ‘Day-O’, calypso music is recognized globally as the ultimate Caribbean party music. However, within the Caribbean basin, veiled behind the curtain of its creole languages, it is especially known for its critique of the dominant classes and the articulation of a plethora of emotions through rhyming of words on a syncopated beat.

Calypso music was birth on Caribbean plantations during slavery as a response to repression during the colonial era. African slaves on the now island nation of Trinidad and Tobago, created a system of communication where they lamented through song in *double entendre*. Today, calypso music is commonly referred to as ‘the voice of the people’.

Using an array of anthropological tools and multilingual reflexive approaches in my writing, in this dissertation, I take the reader on an ethnographic journey into the world of calypso music on the plurilingual Dutch Caribbean island of Aruba. Calypso music has made its way to Aruba by means of inter-Caribbean work migration at the onset of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. What started as ‘immigrant music’, has now become a significant part of Aruba’s intangible cultural heritage for many persons on the island. Yet for the vast academic research carried out on calypso music in Caribbean cultural anthropology, ethnomusicology, literature and history, remarkably little scholarly production has emanated from the Dutch Caribbean.

In general, this dissertation aims to contribute to this gaping void. I do so by engaging with notions and fields such as branding and identity in the Caribbean (The One Happy Island Narrative), Caribbean world making, music and dance, history and migration, plurilingualism, lyrics and creolization among others.

My main argument is premised on the idea that for all of calypso's power to engage with the dominant discourses, as the majority of the existing literature suggests, Critical-Calypso, the slower version of calypso music, has its limitations. I argue that the very much enjoyed, yet much frowned upon, Roadmarch-Calypso, (the more up-tempo party version more popularly known as Soca), deserves deeper scholarly attention. I argue that Roadmarch-Calypso contrary to popular belief, is also able to engage the political in alternative and perhaps even more profound ways despite being seen as frivolous.

To accomplish this, I found theoretical assistance in the thinking of Roland Barthes' notions of *plaisir* [pleasurable enjoyment] and *jouissance* [blissful enjoyment]. It has provided me with a vocabulary to further accentuate the experiences underlying these two varieties of calypso and how they engage with dominant discourses in Aruban society.

Some of the major takeaways of this study can be summarized along these lines.

Despite the limitations of creolization theories, the creole approach to Caribbean world making allows a space for deeper understanding of a musical genre that has traditionally been seen as simply 'Trinidadian', 'English Caribbean', 'the voice of the people' and as solely of 'African extraction'.

What my ethnography also shows is that we should not place too much emphasis on fixed conceptual labels when engaging in our anthropology as researchers. There is an eminent danger in reducing our interlocutors' stories to a single narrative or dual narratives for that matter. The research also shows, that which we wish to shed light on is dynamic and ever-changing. We see that for example Arubans continuously show much agency in how they engage with calypso music. They demonstrate this by looking for new ways to subvert the constraints of oppressive power laden constructs and even politics by means of dance and expression.

Lastly, this dissertation shows that Roadmarch-Calypso music and Critical-Calypso should not be seen as opposing entities. Rather, they should be seen as part of a continuous process whereby the *plaisir* of the cerebral Critical-Calypso lays the groundwork for the possible *jouissance* of the Roadmarch-Calypso.



## Samenvatting

Calypsomuziek is een van de oudste en meest herkenbare muziekgenres uit het Engelssprekend Caribisch gebied. Met wereldbekende hits zoals *'Feeling hot hot hot'* en populaire klassiekers zoals de *Banana Boat Song - 'Day-O'*, staat calypsomuziek wereldwijd bekend als de ultieme Caribische feestmuziek. Als we nader kijken, zien we dat binnen het Caribisch gebied, verpakt in haar creoolse talen, calypsomuziek vooral bekend staat om haar rijmende teksten op syncopische ritmes, dat kritiek uitoefent op de elites in de samenleving.

Calypsomuziek is ontstaan tijdens de slavernijperiode op plantages in het Caribisch gebied. Afrikaanse slaven van Trinidad en Tobago die zich niet openlijk konden uiten tegen koloniale onderdrukking, zochten alternatieven om dit te bewerkstelligen door bijvoorbeeld gelaagde klaagliederen richting de slavenmeesters te zingen. Calypsomuziek staat nu onder een groot deel van het Caribisch volk bekend als *'the voice of the people'*.

Door een reeks van antropologische dataverzamelingmethoden en reflexieve schrijfstijlen te gebruiken, wordt de lezer in deze dissertatie op een etnografische reis meegenomen binnen de calypsowereld op het meertalig Nederlands Caribisch eiland van Aruba.

Calypsomuziek maakte haar entrée op Aruba aan het begin van de 20ste eeuw als gevolg van regionale arbeidsmigratie. Deze arbeidsmigranten kwamen voornamelijk uit de Engelssprekende delen van het Caribisch gebied. Wat in essentie als *'migrantenmuziek'* begon, heeft zich door de jaren heen ontplooid, waardoor het nu door velen wordt gezien als een belangrijk onderdeel van het Arubaans immaterieel erfgoed. Hoewel er een relatief uitgebreide wetenschappelijke calypsomuziek canon bestaat in de Caribische culturele antropologie, etnomusicologie, letteren en geschiedenis, zien we dat er weinig academische werken zijn afkomstig vanuit het Nederlands Caribisch gebied.

Deze dissertatie heeft onder andere als doel om bij te dragen aan het vullen van dit hiaat. Dit doe ik door me te verdiepen in noties en gebieden zoals branding en identiteit in het Caribisch gebied (*The One happy Island Narrative*), *Caribbean world making*, muziek en dans, geschiedenis en migratie, meertaligheid, zangteksten en creolisatie.

Mijn hoofdargument is gestoeld op het idee dat calypsomuziek zijn tekortkomingen heeft, hoewel zij vrij effectief is in het uiten van kritiek tegen de gevestigde orde, zoals wordt aangegeven in de literatuur. Het gaat hier voornamelijk om het Critical-Calypso, een langzamere variant van dit muziekgenre. Ik beargumenteer daar tegenover, dat de Roadmarch-Calypso, (een snellere uptempo party variant, ook bekend als Soca), meer wetenschappelijke aandacht nodig heeft, desondanks het feit dat academici calypso te lichtzinnig vinden. In mijn argument probeer ik duidelijk te maken dat Roadmarch-Calypso ook mogelijk een vorm van politieke engagement is, naast het feit dat het als pop-dansmuziek beschouwd wordt. In sommige opzichten is het zelfs complexer en gaat het verder dan de traditionele Critical-Calypso.

Ik heb theoretische ondersteuning gevonden in het gedachtegoed van Roland Barthes en zijn uiteenzetting van de noties *plaisir* [pleasurable enjoyment] en *jouissance* [blissful enjoyment]. Hierdoor had ik toegang tot het meest toereikend taalgebruik om de ervaringen rondom deze twee calypso varianten uiteen te zetten.

De grootste bevindingen van deze dissertatie zijn samengevat aan de hand van de volgende punten.

Desondanks de beperkingen rondom creoliseringstheorieën, zien we dat de ‘*creole approach to Caribbean world making*’ ruimte geeft voor het beter begrijpen van een muziekgenre dat voornamelijk nog steeds wordt gezien al ‘Trinidadiaans’, ‘Engels Caribisch’, ‘*the voice of the people*’ en alleen van ‘Afrikaanse afkomst’.

Wat mijn etnografie ook laat zien is dat we als antropologen niet te veel nadruk moeten leggen op vaste conceptuele modellen binnen ons werk. Een groot gevaar loert bij het vroegtijdig conceptualiseren en minimaliseren van de complexe verhalen van onze gesprekspartners tijdens het onderzoek. De levens van mensen zijn dynamisch en zijn in een continu proces van verandering. We zien dat Arubanen bijvoorbeeld keer op keer ‘agency’ tonen als respons op de beperkingen van calypsomuziek in tegenstelling tot wat vaak in de literatuur geschreven staat. De Arubaanse populatie is continu op zoek naar manieren om deze opgelegde beperkingen te ondermijnen door naar alternatieven te zoeken zoals dans en andere vormen van expressie.

Ter conclusie laat deze dissertatie zien hoe Roadmarch-Calypso en Critical-Calypso geen opposanten zijn. Deze varianten zijn juist onderdelen van een verweven proces waarbij de *plaisir* van het intellectuele Critical-Calypso de fundering legt voor een mogelijke *jouissance* van de Roadmarch-Calypso en zo ook indirect de ultieme kritiek.