

Exploring the Self-build Architecture of the African Curacaoans during the Post-Emancipation Period

Zedi M.A. van Oostrom

Supervisor: K. Zhu

AR2A011, Architecture, Urbanism and Building Sciences, Technische
Universiteit Delft, The Netherlands

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Abstract – The African Curacaoan architecture has been underexposed in the architectural history of the island and incorrectly generalised as slums or slave huts. Curaçao has a rich creolised architectural history and this paper aims to document the African Curacaoan part of this history. This paper primarily focuses on the post-emancipation period between 1863-1915, but takes a broader look at the history of African Curacaoans from their arrival in the 17th Century until the mid-20th Century. This paper aims to gain a better understanding of the events leading up to emancipation, as well as the progress and developments towards prosperity and agency that occurred after the emancipation. This paper addresses themes at the intersection between postcolonialism and spatial justice: the territorialisation of islands and the denigration of the self-build architecture of marginalised communities in Central and South America. In order to understand how African Curacaoan building practices developed, it is important to examine the power dynamics during and after the colonial period in Curaçao. Additionally, this research explores the available resources for construction and the cultural influences that shaped the architectural styles. Lastly, this paper provides an overview of the housing types created by the African Curacaoan population.

Keywords – Dutch Caribbean, Curaçao, Post-emancipation, Informal Housing, Vernacular Architecture, Creolization

I. Introduction

The abolishment of slavery in Curaçao has led to self-build architecture practices by the African Curacaoan population which have been underexposed in the architectural history of the island.¹ After centuries of Dutch occupancy of Curaçao, the African Curacaoan population was granted freedom in 1863, marking the beginning of the post-emancipation period. Despite the emancipation, the power dynamics between the White upper class and the Black population remained unequal.² In addition, the Catholic church also exercised its power over the African Curacaoans.³

Because of these challenges, the postcolonial architecture of the freed African Curacaoans is remarkable, showcasing resilience and resistance in the face of adversity. The oppression of the Catholic church and the Dutch plantation owners has been studied from an anthropological stance⁴. Still, it is worth questioning whether the architectural expression of the African Curacaoans reflects any resistance or opposition in relation to this oppression. Investigating if cultural influences and rebellion can be detected in the architecture of the freed and formerly enslaved, can contribute to a better understanding of the identity of African Caribbean architecture. Not only is this an important part of Curaçao's architectural history, but also in the wider debate on postcolonialism and spatial justice.

This thesis aims to explore the development of African Curacaoan architecture. To understand the African Curacaoan architecture and the resulting self-building traditions, it is crucial to examine its cultural origins. In addition, limited resources such as land, building materials, and equipment, affected the resulting self-build housing.

Therefore, this thesis addresses the following research question: *'How did African Curacaoan architecture develop during the post-emancipation period in regards to postcolonial spatial injustice?'*

To answer this question this thesis reviews existing literature and research findings related to postcolonial theory, spatial justice and colonial representation in Chapter II. The literature review examines various scholars' perspectives and studies to construct a better understanding of architecture of marginalized communities in formerly colonize places. Chapters III, IV, V and VI examine the case of Curacao specifically. First, the changing power relations between the Dutch, the Catholic Church, and the African Curacaoans after the emancipation are studied through existing research from the field of Anthropology. The power dynamics between the Dutch, the Catholic Church, and the African-Curacaoans were complex and underwent significant changes. This will be discussed in chapter III. Second, the available resources for architectural construction will be analysed based on Archaeological and Geological research. Whatever resources were available to African-Curacaoans after emancipation, will have played a critical role in shaping their lives and communities. This will be addressed in chapter IV. Third, this paper will examine which cultural resources can be detected in the architecture of the African Curacaoans in chapter V. This chapter will touch upon the topic of creolization. Lastly, Chapter VI will give an overview of African Curacaoan housing types. Through this investigation, the aim is to contribute to a better

¹ Ruben la Cruz 1954- and Karolien Helweg 1963-, *De vergeten monumenten van Curaçao* (Arnhem: LM Publishers, 2014).

² Rose Mary Allen, 'Di Ki Manera? A Social History of Afro-Curacaoans, 1863-1917', *African Diaspora Archaeology Newsletter* 10, no. 2 (2007).

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid; Felicia Jantina Fricke, 'The Lifeways of Enslaved People in Curaçao, St Eustatius, and St Maarten/St Martin: A Thematic Analysis of Archaeological, Osteological, and Oral Historical Data', 2019, <https://doi.org/10.22024/UNIKENT/01.02.75188>.

understanding of the identity of African Curacaoan architecture and the resistance and opposition demonstrated in the architecture of the freed and formerly enslaved.

II. Literature review

During the post-emancipation period, there was an unequal division of land, resources, and power.⁵ For that reason, it is important to understand the wider discussion regarding postcolonial theory and spatial justice, and the more recent debate on how these theories are intertwined.

A key concept of postcolonial theory is the idea that representation is a vehicle to control colonized -or formerly colonized- spaces. One of the founders of post-colonial studies, literary professor Edward Said, brought up the issue of representation stating that “[Representation] is eo ipso implicated, intertwined, embedded, interwoven with a great many other things besides the ‘truth’, which is itself a representation.”⁶ Hereby, arts and literature are instruments to distribute a representation of the Other, the non-western. Said’s focus had been on the Middle East, yet this theory can be extended to the entire Global South, as areas that have been preyed upon by the colonial gaze⁷. There are two examples of oversimplified colonial representations that have affected the architectural development of Curaçao. These are the representations of tropical islands and European power overseas.

Literature professor Johannes Riquet studied how the colonial narrative has controlled the image and perception of islands in art, literature, and science⁸. Important takeaways from his book *The Aesthetics of Island Space: Perception, Ideology, Geopoetics* are that stories about islands have throughout history been about the perseverance of Western civilization. Thereby other subjugated groups have been created onto which Western customs and ideas are tested and projected.⁹ Additionally, Riquet remarks, that in science and literature islands are represented as “beleaguered territories haunted by the spectre of human extinction.”¹⁰ In architecture, these ideas of Western superiority and the destructive nature of island space are especially evident in tropical colonies. Architectural historians Chang and King conducted a case study to British tropical architecture in India, which is characterized by European concepts on health in design. These studies were instigated, because many European explorers perished in the tropical heat¹¹. At first the British adopted building principles from Indigenous Indian peoples to tackle the heat, such as verandas, roll-up screens (*tatties*) and shutters (*jhaump*) made from bamboo and wooden swinging fans (*punkah*).¹² Yet the hazardous climate of tropical environments which was fatal to many explorers, challenged the idea of their racial superiority.¹³ Consequently, the adaptation of *tatties* and *punkahs* denigrated and the British started to conduct their own research on health and sanitation techniques in the tropics, which had become a so-called sanitation syndrome.¹⁴

⁵ Allen, ‘Di Ki Manera? A Social History of Afro-Curaçaoans, 1863-1917’.

⁶ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978). p. 215

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Johannes Riquet, *The Aesthetics of Island Space: Perception, Ideology, Geopoetics* (Oxford University Press, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198832409.001.0001>.

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 303

¹¹ Jiat-Hwee Chang and Anthony D. King, ‘Towards a Genealogy of Tropical Architecture: Historical Fragments of Power-Knowledge, Built Environment and Climate in the British Colonial Territories’, *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 32, no. 3 (1 November 2011): 283–300, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9493.2011.00434.x>.

¹² Ibid

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid; Rachel Lee, ‘Colonial Domesticities - Tracing the Planter’s Chair’, <https://collegeramavideoportal.tudelft.nl/catalogue/ar1a066/presentation/841c0fb9e251461496e35e1356bd29c61d?academicYear=2023-2024-ar1a066>.

From this sanitation syndrome, a European prototype of tropical housing arose, which was applied by Europeans around the world. Architectural researcher Rachel Lee, refers to this as a shift from “respecting to local to something ... abstract and imposed.”¹⁵

Another notable point is the issue of territorialisation to gain power. Geographic historians Armas-Díaz et al. point out islands are naturally demarked by the sea, but territorially claimed by colonists.¹⁶ It is incorrect to assume that urbanization processes on islands are mainly determined by the limitations of the water, rather than the social struggles that stem from territorialization (such as colonization), which remains an issue for islands today. Armas-Díaz et al. explain how the profitability of real estate and tourism determine rules and regulations and consequently, land distribution.¹⁷ The power of the real estate and tourism sector is similar to the power of the Dutch plantation owners in Curaçao: those who make the most profit determine who owns the land. These examples are consistent with economic geographer David Harvey’s argument against the neoliberal idea that land is fluid and individual property is a natural right that occurs for labourers who make a profit from land¹⁸. Instead, Harvey claims that the right to the city should be “the freedom to make and remake the city” to whatever the people collectively desire.¹⁹ Armas-Díaz et al. extend this argument to the context of the island and nature in general, stating that “the right to the island [is] the right to influence and redirect urbanization processes” in a democratic manner to assure socio-environmental justice.²⁰

In the context of Curaçao specifically, it is evident how power is claimed through representation. Art Historian Marsely Kehoe compared scripture and prints from the Dutch Golden Age to the remaining 17th Century architecture of Willemstad, Curaçao, and Batavia Stad (now, Jakarta), Indonesia.²¹ Her research indicates that the Dutch gable is overly present, even though this does not correspond with the preserved architecture from the colonial period. These “imaginary gables” were excessively illustrated to exaggerate the Dutch presence overseas.²² This representation of Curaçao is inaccurate and it effaces the architectural history of others; the Indigenous and the West Africans. Kehoe’s research shows how important it is to decolonize the representation of Curaçao’s past. Archaeologist Rim Kelouaze makes a similar argument to decolonize the architectural history of the entire African diaspora:

“ Being subject to power relations and continued equity imbalances, demonstrating that it is the most powerful that writes history. Thus, the dominant narratives around architectures and arts during the colonial period and post-colonial, especially in the versions dedicated to international policy regimes of official recognition of cultural heritage, continue to reflect the power imbalances between colonizer/colonized; perpetrator/victim.”²³

¹⁵ Rachel Lee, ‘Colonial Domesticities - Tracing the Planter’s Chair’, time: 1:22:49

¹⁶ Alejandro Armas-Díaz e.a., ‘Beyond the Right to the Island: Exploring Protests against the Neoliberalization of Nature in Tenerife (Canary Islands, Spain)’, *ERDKUNDE* 74, nr. 4 (31 december 2020): 249-62, <https://doi.org/10.3112/erdkunde.2020.04.02>.

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ David (David W.) Harvey 1935-, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (London: Verso, 2012).

¹⁹ Ibid, p.4

²⁰ Armas-Díaz e.a., ‘Beyond the Right to the Island’.

²¹ Marsely L. Kehoe, ‘Imaginary Gables: The Visual Culture of Dutch Architecture in the Indies’, *Journal of Early Modern History* 20, no. 5 (7 September 2016): 462–93, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700658-12342513>.

²² Ibid

²³ Rim Kelouaze, ‘Decolonizing Modern Heritage of Africa: AFRO-BRAZILIAN and NEO-MOORISH Liberation Architectures’, *Curator: The Museum Journal* 65, nr. 3 (juli 2022): 711-20, <https://doi.org/10.1111/cura.12513>. P.713

Consequently, the scarcity of land for marginalised communities in Central and South America has led to informal settlements, which Varley describes as “liminal spaces between first and third worlds that bear witness to the creativity of the urban poor.”²⁴ In some cases, informality is a form of urban planning that allows a subjugated group to create a community of their own that can no longer be controlled by their oppressors. As Michel de Certeau argues, informality can entail a system that operates outside of the control of the dominating class. Or, it can be an internal manipulation of the urban context, in which the dominated class disrupts but does not threaten or reform the power of the dominating class.²⁵ These different degrees of resistance show the complexity of informality. In literature informality is described as either a crime-riddled unorganized occupation of land or a “reconquest of the urban”, but neither is necessarily true.²⁶ This is the crux of postcolonial urbanism: it cannot be generalized and generalizing regardless, feeds into the imperial ideas of how cities should look.

Therefore it is important to separate colonial experiences, rather than to generalize them. There should be a greater referential framework of case studies of architecture and urban planning of the global south as part of a postcolonial approach to the right to the city (or in this particular case, the right to the island) and to investigate subaltern resistances in the aftermath of colonialism. The aspiration is that this study on African Curacaoan self-build practices around the emancipation contributes to a post-colonial architectural discourse.

III. Changing power relations after the emancipation

Legally, slavery was abolished on the first of July in 1863, but 65 per cent of the African Curacaoan population was already manumitted before this date.²⁷ In fact, Curaçao relatively had the most freed people of colour in the early 19th Century of the entire Caribbean. Partly because the African descendant population was small in comparison; unlike other colonies, the slave trade was no longer profitable in the 18th Century, so the island lost its primary function as a transit depot.²⁸ In addition, the Colonial state enforced stricter rules for slave owners to limit abuse of the enslaved already at the beginning of the 19th Century.²⁹

Nevertheless, some forms of oppression and structures from slavery remained, even after the emancipation. As Fricke states: “[E]mancipation in the Caribbean was not complete when the legal status of enslaved people changed in the 19th century ... Rather, a prolonged period of transition from enslaved to free began that, some would argue, is still continuing today.”³⁰ The colonial state and the Catholic Church both play a crucial role in the oppression in the development towards and after the emancipation.

The Relation between the Colonial State and the African Curacaoan Population

The colonial state was mostly concerned with labour, public order, and security. In the time leading up to emancipation, the state and plantation owners had feared outbursts of violence and an unwillingness to work from the African Curacaoans. So most of the state’s budget went into

²⁴ Ann Varley, ‘Postcolonialising Informality?’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 31, nr. 1 (februari 2013): 4-22, <https://doi.org/10.1068/d14410>.

²⁵ Michel de Certeau 1925-1986., *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988).

²⁶ Varley, ‘Postcolonialising Informality?’

²⁷ Rose Mary Allen, ‘Di ki manera? A Social History of Afro-Curaçaoans, 1863-1917’.

²⁸ Wim Klooster, ‘CURAQAO AND THE CARIBBEAN TRANSIT TRADE’, 2003.

²⁹ Rose Mary Allen, ‘Di ki manera? A Social History of Afro-Curaçaoans, 1863-1917’.

³⁰ Felicia Jantina Fricke, ‘The Lifeways of Enslaved People in Curaçao, St Eustatius, and St Maarten/St Martin: A Thematic Analysis of Archaeological, Osteological, and Oral Historical Data’, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.22024/UNIKENT/01.02.75188>. 197

legal measures and policies to control African Curacaoans.³¹ Additionally, the state redivided the island into five districts instead of three (Figure 1). Each district was governed by a district commissioner: a government official who maintained the roads and public property, but was also involved in all administrative, judicial, and police matters in his district. The commissioner judged applications for land, which was a challenging task; land was scarce since most of it was already distributed before the emancipation among plantation owners.³² The plantation owners were also against African Curacaoans owning land. On the one hand, they preferred to have good labourers living or growing crops on their land, so they would remain in control. On the other hand, they did not want disobedient African Curacaoans on or even near their plantations anymore.³³ The plantation owners worked closely with the district commissioners; when an African Curacaoan applied for land, their former masters were consulted. That is how applications could be denied if a former slave was too valuable for a plantation owner or if the plantation owner had a dislike against them.³⁴ Plantation owners also occasionally bribed district commissioners and many of them held important functions within the government.³⁵

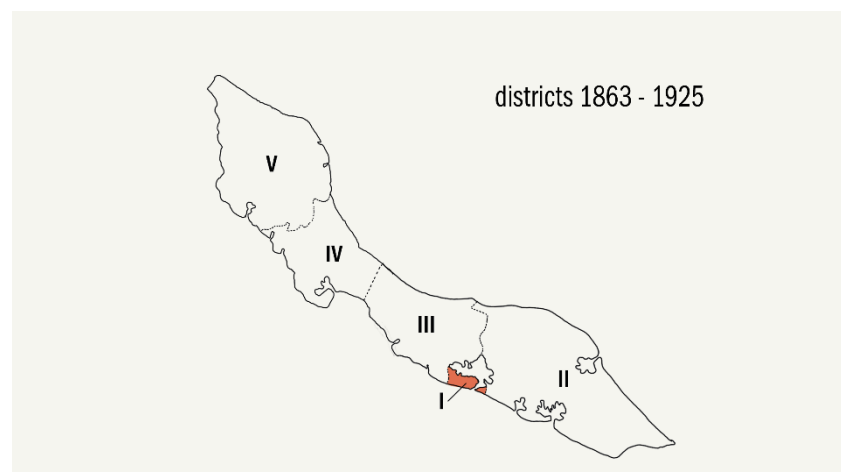


Figure 1. Redivided island districts of Curaçao from 1863 to 1925 as a precaution for emancipation, Capital district indicated in red. (own work based on Werbata, 1909-1910; Buzink, n.d.)

Acquiring land was for many African Curacaoans impossible: the spatial injustice was abundantly evident. Even before emancipation, manumitted African Curacaoans were assigned to live on the *Sabana*, an infertile part of the island.³⁶ Consequently, these free people were malnourished and unhealthy. After emancipation, the *para tega* system came into place: plantation owners granted land to former slaves for agriculture and housing. The land they were granted by the plantation owner to work and live on was called the *Kunuku* (Figure 2). However, under the *para tega* system, it was obligated that African Curacaoans worked for the plantation owner for twelve days a year for free. In some cases, former slaves had to work for even more days, in bad conditions,

³¹ Rose Mary Allen, 'Di Ki Manera? A Social History of Afro-Curaçaoans, 1863-1917'.

³² Ibid; Rose Mary Allen, 'The Harvest Ceremony *Seú* as a Case Study of the Dynamics of Power in Post-Emancipation Curaçao (1863-1915)'.

³³ Allen, 'Di Ki Manera? A Social History of Afro-Curaçaoans, 1863-1917'.

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Ibid

and even pregnant women and children were forced to work.³⁷ *Para tega* also came with great uncertainty; if the plantation owner saw fit “they could ban an entire family from their land without prior warning, leaving the family unemployed and homeless.”³⁸



Figure 2. Unknown artist, Kunuku houses assumably at plantation Klein Santa Martha, c. 1910-1915. Photograph. Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen / Tropenmuseum (DGZ Digital Image Library, image code 60019498).

There was a difference between the opportunities of African Curacaoans on the east side, the west side and the city district of the island. The African Curacaoan population on the west side were much more likely to remain on the plantations under the *para tega* conditions. In contrast to African Curacaoans on the east side and in Willemstad, who had better working opportunities as artisans, such as shoemakers, carpenters or masons. These differences are also evident in the resulting architecture from the east, west and the city, which will be discussed further in Chapter IV.³⁹

The Influence of the Catholic Church on the African Curacaoans

The Catholic Church had an even greater influence on African Curacaoan lives than the colonial state after emancipation. This was partly instigated by the state. Since the state feared a tumultuous period after the abolition of slavery, it saw an opportunity in the arrival of the evangelists on the island.⁴⁰ However, there was a moral difference between the church and the state. As the state had firmly expressed that it was not their intention to aid the poor, was helping the poor at the centre of the Church’s mission.⁴¹

The Dutch priests first came to the island in 1824, because they wanted to educate and convert the African Curacaoan population.⁴² They believed that without their intervention, the African Curacaoans would become animal-like after emancipation.⁴³ The state funded their mission by

³⁷ Fricke, ‘The Lifeways of Enslaved People in Curaçao, St Eustatius, and St Maarten/St Martin’.

³⁸ Allen, ‘Di Ki Manera? A Social History of Afro-Curaçaoans, 1863-1917’: p 134

³⁹ Ibid; A. M. Monsanto and C. Monsanto-Schuster, *E kas, e kas ta bon traha .!.*, UNA-Cahier; no. 34 ([Willemstad, Curaçao]: Universiteit van de Nederlandse Antillen, 1991).

⁴⁰ Allen, ‘Di Ki Manera? A Social History of Afro-Curaçaoans, 1863-1917’.

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² Allen, ‘The Harvest Ceremony *Seú* as a Case Study of the Dynamics of Power in Post-Emancipation Curaçao (1863–1915)’.

⁴³ Allen, ‘Di Ki Manera? A Social History of Afro-Curaçaoans, 1863-1917’.

granting the Catholic Church land for schools, churches, and housing. By 1860, three years before emancipation, the Catholic Church had converted 85% of the African Curacaoan population. Additionally, by 1899 the Church had established seven villages on the island, where they could provide housing for the free and education for free and enslaved children⁴⁴. However, these villages came with their own provisions; if one did not abide by the Church's rules, they could be banned from the village.⁴⁵ Additionally, priests would discourage the district commissioners from giving a banned person or family land. These oppressive tendencies of the priests resulted in the population referring to them as *shons*: a Papiamentu term for slave-owner.⁴⁶

The Church had strict rules on how to be a good Catholic. Most rules regarded family life, marriage, and children, but the evangelists were also sternly against African Curacaoan rituals and fests⁴⁷. They regarded African customs as heinous, loud, and wicked. So the converted African Curacaoans were prohibited from participating in rituals like *Seú* and *Tambú* and thereby they aimed to erase African Curacaoan culture.⁴⁸ Varley argues that accusations of witchcraft in the Americas is also used to dismiss informal architecture⁴⁹. The priests also created didactic stories to convince the African Curacaoans that if they were thrifty, well-behaved, and hard-working, they could acquire a piece of land. This feeds into the neoliberal idea that land is a natural right for the hard-working, which has proven to be untrue.⁵⁰

IV. Resources for architectural construction

This chapter identifies three elements that are needed for architectural construction: building land, construction materials and building knowledge. However, it should be noted African Curacaoan population has been heterogeneous from the start since the enslaved had come from different African countries.⁵¹ There was also a hierarchical difference between Creole-born and African-born slaves, caused by the continued influx of new slaves in the 17th and 18th centuries. In the 19th century, a difference emerged between those who had been manumitted before 1863 and those emancipated after.⁵² Thus, this chapter acknowledges the difference in knowledge among the formerly enslaved, but also a difference in opportunity, which has played a role in the acquisition of land and possibilities to obtain building materials.

Struggles in acquiring land after the emancipation

Essentially, Curacaoan land can be divided into two categories: the fertile grounds and the *Sabana*. During the colonial period, all the fertile land was privately owned by the plantation owners, which was most of the island. Figures 3 and 4 illustrate how land division on Curaçao looked like in the 18th until 20th Century. The state owned the *Sabana*, the infertile lands on the island. So, the land that the government was able to provide to the Catholic Church and to independent applications from formerly enslaved people was all barren.⁵³ In addition, there was a drinking

⁴⁴ Ronald (Ronald Gilbert) Gill 1941-, *Een eeuw architectuur op Curaçao : de architectuur en stedenbouw van de twintigste eeuw op Curaçao* (Curaçao: Stichting Het Curaçaosch Museum, 1999).

⁴⁵ Allen, 'Di Ki Manera? A Social History of Afro-Curaçaoans, 1863-1917'.

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ Allen, 'The Harvest Ceremony *Seú* as a Case Study of the Dynamics of Power in Post-Emancipation Curaçao (1863-1915)'.

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ Varley, 'Postcolonialising Informality?'

⁵⁰ Harvey, *Rebel Cities : From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*.

⁵¹ Allen, 'Di Ki Manera? A Social History of Afro-Curaçaoans, 1863-1917'.

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ Eddy Baetens, 'De Ontwikkeling van Bewoning Buiten Willemstad', Canon van Curaçao, 11. De ontwikkeling van bewoning buiten Willemstad, accessed 15 April 2024, <https://canoncuracao.cw/11-ontwikkeling-nederzettingen-en-barios-buiten-willemstad/>.

water shortage outside of the plantations. Many African Curacaoans stayed at the plantations under the *para tega* system, but not only because of the fertile land and the clean water. The main reason was that it was legally not allowed to attain land for those who worked under *para tega*. The State viewed African Curacaoans leaving the plantation as unwanted and excessive independence and therefore it refused their applications for land. This rule was solely in favour of the plantation owners who wanted to stay in control of their workers.⁵⁴



Figure 3. Gerard van Keulen, part of map of Curaçao from with trees indicating plantations, 1715. Copper print. Atlas of Mutual Heritage (Nationaal Archief, image code VEL590B).

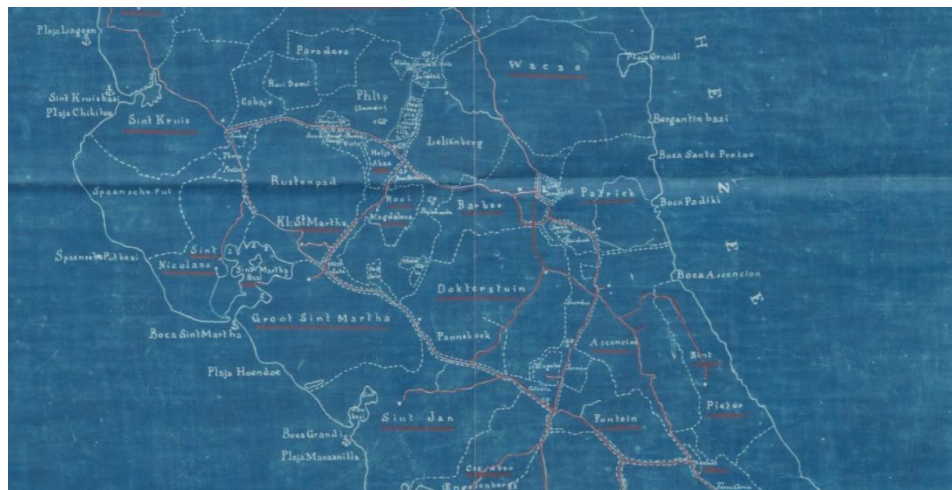


Figure 4. Johannes V.B. Werbata, fragment of map of Curaçao from with dashed lines showing plantation borders, c. 1910. Blue print. (Universitaire Bibliotheken Leiden)

However, the influence of the plantation owners was slowly decreasing after the emancipation. African Curacaoans applied increasingly and extensively to purchase government land and eventually in 1885, the government had to give in and started distributing land far away from the

⁵⁴ Allen, 'Di Ki Manera? A Social History of Afro-Curaçaoans, 1863-1917'.

plantations. Over time, as plantations had become less profitable, plantation owners would sell parts of their land to the government, which would in turn sell to the Black working class. Through this persistence, they attained independence.⁵⁵

As mentioned in Chapter III, the Church also provided opportunities for African Curacaoans to own land. If they had proven to be “*un bon katólíko*” (a good catholic), the Church would grant them a piece of land so they could build a house.⁵⁶ They could nevertheless still be expelled from mission land if they did not abide by the Church’s code of conduct. More so, the church’s power did not end on its mission land; priests could also influence district commissioners to evict people from government land.⁵⁷

It is worth mentioning the pride that African Curacaoans took in owning land; their land would be considered a part of their identity. Artisans, who lived in the towns (Otrobanda and Punda), viewed their land ownership as a brave and cunning achievement and they considered those who lived on the Kunuku to be docile, submissive and sometimes stupid.⁵⁸ A comment must be made here, however, because the people on the Kunuku were respected for their traditional medical practices and the cultivation of medicinal plants.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, usually, the former slaves who worked as artisans, rather than in agriculture, could buy their freedom before the emancipation. Consequently, due to their more fortunate financial position and the ensuing societal value, they could work and live independently in Punda and Otrobanda. The pride in land ownership was in town and countryside alike, as it was a symbol of freedom from the *shon*.⁶⁰

Regarding spatial justice, this pride in ownership and the struggle to attain ownership of land, shows again how the right to the urban space is not something that simply occurs for the hard-working. Instead, this was a strategy of resistance, which De Certeau describes as “ways of playing and foiling the other’s game”⁶¹. The African Curacaoan population found ways to attain power, while still complying with the rules of the popular class.⁶² The State and the elite had feared rebelliousness, and uncivilized behaviour and, consequently, they stipulated rules to promote obedience, whilst also safeguarding the property of the elite. Yet, the African Curacaoans managed to appropriate space despite these rules, because their numerous and constant applications for land purchase could not be ignored.⁶³

Available construction materials on the island

African Curacaoan architecture can be categorised as informal, because it is self-built and primarily vernacular.⁶⁴ Generally, the houses that derived from this informality can be divided into the *kunuku houses* (since the African Curacaoan population lived on the *kunuku* during slavery) and the small worker’s houses in town, also referred to as *kas di krioyo*. Some authors refer to all houses made by African Curacaoans as *Kunuku houses* or *slave huts*, but this detracts from the

⁵⁵ Allen, ‘Di Ki Manera? A Social History of Afro-Curaçaoans, 1863-1917’.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p 149

⁵⁷ Ibid

⁵⁸ Ibid

⁵⁹ Dinah Veeris 1939-, H.M. Jonkergauw, and J. Ledebøer, *Van amandel tot zjozjolf : de geneeskrachtige werking en historische achtergronden van kruiden van de Nederlandse Antillen en Aruba*, 4e dr (Rotterdam: De Driehoek, 2010).

⁶⁰ Allen, ‘Di Ki Manera? A Social History of Afro-Curaçaoans, 1863-1917’.

⁶¹ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. p.18

⁶² Allen, ‘The Harvest Ceremony *Seú* as a Case Study of the Dynamics of Power in Post-Emancipation Curaçao (1863–1915)’.

⁶³ Allen, ‘Di Ki Manera? A Social History of Afro-Curaçaoans, 1863-1917’.

⁶⁴ Varley, ‘Postcolonialising Informality?’; Allen, ‘The Harvest Ceremony *Seú* as a Case Study of the Dynamics of Power in Post-Emancipation Curaçao (1863–1915)’.

great variety of houses and evolvments of the 19th and early 20th centuries.⁶⁵ There are differences between the *kas di Kunuku* and the *kas di krioyo*, depending on their location and the prosperity of the resident. In addition, materials used by African Curacaoans changed over time. And so, the idiom of their architecture also evolved.

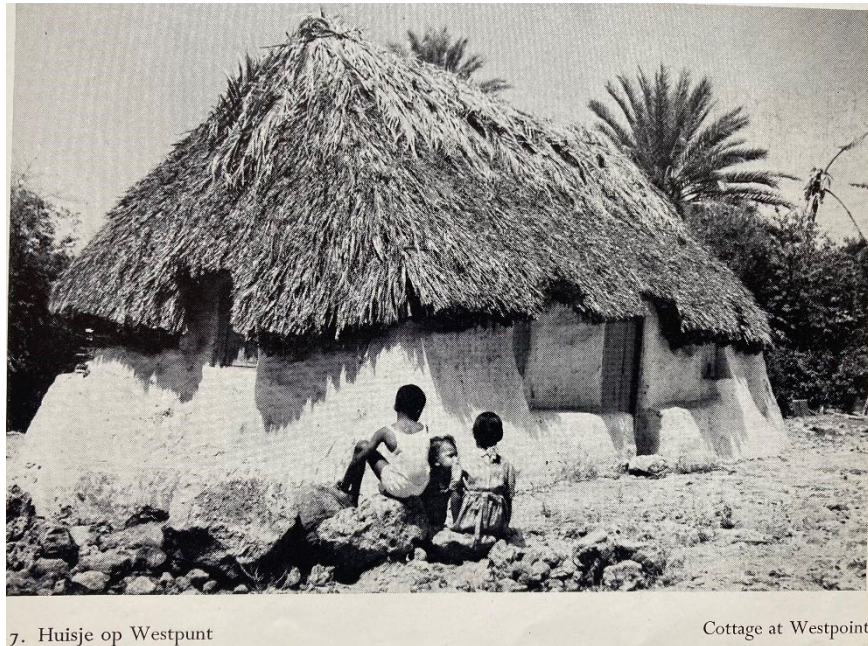


Figure 4. Image of a Kunuku house in Westpunt. (extracted from Ozinga and Van der Wal, 1959)

The oldest generation of *kunuku* houses (Figure 4) is comprised out of organic material. Bricks were shipped to the island for building construction, because it was a favourable ballast material, but it was reserved for prominent buildings such as forts and land houses.⁶⁶ Instead, the *Kunuku* house was made from locally sourced organic materials. It had a thatched roof and wattle daub walls with wooden poles and beams as load-bearing construction. The thatch was made from sorghum stalks.⁶⁷ Sorghum is a West African plant that many enslaved were accustomed to, so they cultivated in the Caribbean as well.⁶⁸ The daub was made from red clay and mixed with grass and a white clay daub was used for the finish.⁶⁹ The *kunuku* houses are named after the material of the wattle and the thatch: *kas di pal'i maishi* (house of maize), *kas di yerba* (house of grass).⁷⁰ There are several types of wood used for the construction. The vertical poles could be made from several types of wood, including brasil wood. This wood type was the main reason for the Dutch to colonize Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao: it is a strong type of wood that could be used to repair

⁶⁵ Gill, *Een eeuw architectuur op Curaçao : de architectuur en stedenbouw van de twintigste eeuw op Curaçao*; Marian D. Klokkers, *Woonwensen op Curaçao : een analyse van de woningontwerpen van zelfbouwers ten behoeve van de volkswoningbouw : doctoraal onderzoek sociologie der niet-Westerse Volken* (Leiden: [s.n.], 1983).

⁶⁶ Edward E. Crain, *Historic Architecture in the Caribbean Islands* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994).

⁶⁷ Jay B Haviser, 'SOCIAL REPERCUSSIONS OF SLAVERY AS EVIDENT IN AFRICAN-CURAÇAOAN "KUNUKU" HOUSES', 1997.

⁶⁸ Allen, 'The Harvest Ceremony *Seú* as a Case Study of the Dynamics of Power in Post-Emancipation Curaçao (1863–1915)'.

⁶⁹ F D Boi Antoin and Jay B Haviser, 'Observations Of Vernacular Architectural Diversity Between Curaçao And Bonaire', *INTERNATIONAL*, 2003.

⁷⁰ Haviser, 'SOCIAL REPERCUSSIONS OF SLAVERY AS EVIDENT IN AFRICAN-CURAÇAOAN "KUNUKU" HOUSES'.

ships and build houses. This tropical hardwood even was exported to the Netherlands for building construction. The roof trusses were made from calabash wood; a tree that was introduced to the island by Amerindians from Venezuela before the European settlers⁷¹. Door and window frames were made from wayaca or cactus wood.⁷² Later, the walls of the Kunuku houses were built from stone material, like coral stone, instead of wattle and daub. The roofs were also no longer thatched, but clad with corrugated tin plates or, if the homeowner had more to spend, ceramic tiles.⁷³

On the east side of the island, African Curacaoans had opportunities to work in the capital Willemstad after the emancipation, as masons or carpenters.⁷⁴ This prosperity is expressed in the architecture of the east side and near the city border. Architecture researchers Monsanto and Monsanto-Schuster refer to this housing type as the *Woonhuismonument*.⁷⁵ (See Figure 5). Interestingly, this house type has a Dutch name, not a Papiamentu one like the other housing types. The oldest variant of these houses (ca. 1900) is constructed out of coral stone like the Kunuku houses, however later, these houses were constructed out of imported stone materials from the US and Europe. The roofs are tiled and completed with a wooden cornice.⁷⁶



Figure 5. Image of a *Woonhuismonument* near Abrahamsz. (extracted from Gill, 1999)

The houses in the Willemstad and surrounding neighbourhoods had a different construction, but the same basic floor plan as the Kunuku house and the *Woonhuismonument*. (See Figures 6 and 7) From emancipation until the 1950s, timber battens with painted wooden planks were common.⁷⁷ This wood was mostly scrap wood from the harbour. In 1915, when Shell started an oil refinery on the island, the scrap metal from the oil tins was embraced by African Curacaoans as a new

⁷¹ Gerard Buurt, *A SHORT NATURAL HISTORY OF CURAÇAO*, 2009; Antoin and Haviser, 'Observations Of Vernacular Architectural Diversity Between Curaçao And Bonaire', *I N T E R N A T I O N A L*, 2003.

⁷² Antoin and Haviser, 'Observations Of Vernacular Architectural Diversity Between Curaçao And Bonaire', 2003

⁷³ Haviser, 'SOCIAL REPERCUSSIONS OF SLAVERY AS EVIDENT IN AFRICAN-CURAÇAOAN "KUNUKU" HOUSES'.

⁷⁴ Allen, 'Di Ki Manera? A Social History of Afro-Curaçaoans, 1863-1917'.

⁷⁵ Monsanto and Monsanto-Schuster, *E kas, e kas ta bon traha .!*

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Klokkers, *Woonwensen op Curaçao : een analyse van de woningontwerpen van zelfbouwers ten behoeve van de volkswoningbouw*; Michael A. Newton, 'Houten huizen', Center for Archeology and Anthropology, 2022, <https://naam.cw/nl/2015/03/18/kas-di-palukas-di-tabla/>.

cheap cladding material.⁷⁸ In South and Central America, the usage of city waste as building materials is often misrepresented as devil worship. This is a method to vilify informal housing practices, because they do not abide by the rules of the dominant class⁷⁹. Architectural historian Louis P. Nelson instead argues that the usage of waste is a necessary form of creativity that arises from a lack of available resources.⁸⁰



Figure 6. *Kas di Tabla*: wooden house. (extracted from Newton, 2022)



Figure 7. *Kas di palu furá bleki*: tin house. (extracted from La Cruz and Helweg, 2014)

⁷⁸ La Cruz 1954- and Helweg 1963-, *De vergeten monumenten van Curaçao* (Arnhem: LM Publishers, 2014).

⁷⁹ Carlos Brillembourg, 'The new slum urbanism of Caracas, invasions and settlements, Colonialism, democracy, capitalism and devil worship', *Architectural Design* 74 (1 maart 2004): 77-81; Varley, 'Postcolonialising Informality?'

⁸⁰ Louis P. Nelson, 'The Architectures of Black Identity: Buildings, Slavery, and Freedom in the Caribbean and the American South', *Winterthur Portfolio* 45, no. 2/3 (June 2011): 177-94, <https://doi.org/10.1086/660810>.

Knowledge on construction methods

The first generation African Curacaoans built houses with wattle-daub walls with a clay or mud finish and thatched roofs, similar to the Nchumuru of Wiaie, a West African tribe.⁸¹ The influence of the Nchumuru is further elaborated in chapter V. To strengthen the walls, the African Curacaoans added a stone base.⁸² The wooden beams and poles were bound together with strips of split wood (later on with copper wire or nylon).⁸³ Usually, a house was constructed out of three buildings: a building for sleeping and living, a building for the kitchen and bathroom building and a storage building. It was common to extend the house backwards, thereby aligning the side walls and the doors (See Figure 8). On the Kunuku it was also common to build a new house in front of the old, when the old house was falling into decay. Because it was believed that demolishing the old house would lead to the death of an elder, the old house was used for storage.⁸⁴

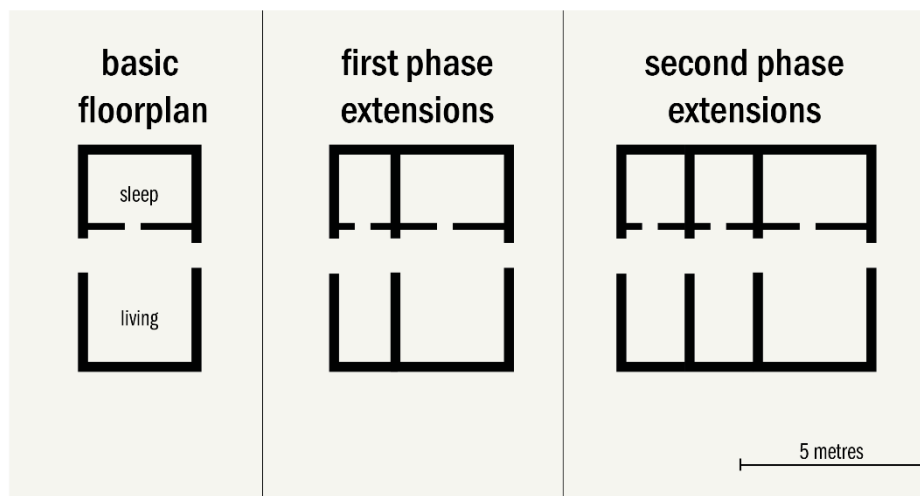


Figure 8. Common extensions to African Curacaoan housing in floorplan. (own work based on Haviser, 1997; Antoin and Haviser, 2003)

Since the Kunuku house required a lot of maintenance, e.g. the thatched roof had to be replaced every five years, it became more common to build with scrap material from the harbour instead of organic material.⁸⁵ This is how the *kas di Tabla* and the *kas di palu furá ku bleki* were created. African Curacaoans collected old wooden ship crates and containers for construction. They took the crates and containers apart and the resulting slats were set aside until there was enough for a timber frame construction. Then, they made a concrete base on top of which they started with the timber frame, usually modelled after their neighbour's house (see Figure 9).⁸⁶ Thereafter, the house would be clad with planks (*tabla*) or metal (*bleki*), which were also originally waste products from the harbour. Lastly, the African Curacaoans would paint their house. For the

⁸¹ Haviser, 'SOCIAL REPERCUSSIONS OF SLAVERY AS EVIDENT IN AFRICAN-CURAÇAOAN "KUNUKU" HOUSES'.

⁸² Antoin and Haviser, 'Observations Of Vernacular Architectural Diversity Between Curaçao And Bonaire', 2003

⁸³ Jay B Haviser, 'AN ETHNO-ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDY OF WOOD AND OTHER ORGANIC MATERIALS USED BY AFRICAN-CURAÇAOAN PEOPLES DURING THE POST-EMANCIPATION PERIOD', 2001.

⁸⁴ Fricke, 'The Lifeways of Enslaved People in Curaçao, St Eustatius, and St Maarten/St Martin'.

⁸⁵ La Cruz and Helweg, 2014, *De vergeten monumenten van Curaçao*

⁸⁶ Ibid.

exterior they used coloured paint, on the interior of the walls they would add white paint directly onto the construction or they would use wallpaper, if they had the means.⁸⁷

The *Woonhuismonument* has a very different construction method than the houses mentioned above. This house type displays the skills of its owners, who were usually masons, carpenters or other artisan workers. This house is built from skilfully stacked stonework finished with a pigmented mixture of sand and limestone. The *Woonhuismonument* is known for its ornamentation; profiled roof moulding and classical elements.⁸⁸

All these housing types have a common factor in their building methods: they are all self-build with help from family, friends and neighbours. Whatever method African Curacaoans used for construction fell within their own skillset or was copied from their neighbours.⁸⁹



Figure 9. Picture from 1919 of a *Kas di Tabla* under construction, made from scrap wood. (extracted from Brozek, 2019)

V. Cultural influences

A new culture emerged in Curacao among the African Curacaoans. Even though the enslaved arrived with little to no material possessions and they were subjugated by the rules of the Dutch slave owners, their first settlements were evidently of West African origin. Yet later, the influences of the Europeans become part of African Curacaoan architecture as well. Caribbean region is defined by *creolisation*: “a term referring to the process by which elements of different cultures are blended together to create a new culture.”⁹⁰ Patricia E. Green also refers to this process as cultural syncretism between Indigenous, European and African peoples⁹¹. However, in the case of

⁸⁷ La Cruz and Helweg, 2014, *De vergeten monumenten van Curaçao*

⁸⁸ Monsanto and Monsanto-Schuster, *E kas, e kas ta bon traha .!*

⁸⁹ Ibid; La Cruz and Helweg, 2014

⁹⁰ Jane Webster, ‘Creolization’, in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Classics*, by Jane Webster (Oxford University Press, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199381135.013.6981>. p.1

⁹¹ Patricia Elaine Green, ‘Creole and Vernacular Architecture: Embryonic Syncretism in Caribbean Cultural Landscape’, *The Journal of Architecture* 27, no. 1 (2 January 2022): 21–43, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602365.2022.2047761>.

Curaçao, these three groups were not present at the same time in the island's history; the first European settlers in 1499 were Spanish and due to their arrival the vast majority of the Indigenous Arawaks had either fled, were deported, or died. More than a decade later, after the Dutch had acquired the island in 1634 from the Spanish, Curaçao became a commercial slave trade centre in 1644. The Spanish and the very few Arawaks that were left had burned all Arawakan buildings because of the Dutch occupation. The Dutch deported the remaining Arawaks of Curacao and it is presumed that they did not exchange any building traditions or material knowledge⁹². So regarding African Curacaoan architecture, the syncretism is mainly between European peoples, namely the Dutch, and African peoples, notably the Nchumuru. This chapter explores the impact of the creolisation on African Curacaoan architecture by examining these two dominant, yet opposing, cultures.

Construction methods and materials

The first Kunuku houses on Curaçao show many similarities to the houses of the Nchumuru, a people that originate from current Ghana⁹³. The construction method, using wattle and daub and a thatched roof, is similar. As mentioned in Chapter IV, the first-generation Kunuku houses were built from local natural or agricultural materials, such as branches, clay, and sorghum stalks. In contrast to the Dutch, who were accustomed to building with manufactured materials such as brick and ceramic tiles⁹⁴. Even though these materials could be used as ballast in shipping, it eventually became too expensive to build entire buildings from exported materials and the Dutch colonists' attempts to manufacture brick locally were unsuccessful.⁹⁵ Thus, the Dutch adapted to local stone materials: coral stone and limestone. Both these stones were irregular in form as a result of which walls got thicker. To finish, the buildings were daubed with white lime.⁹⁶

The usage of coral- and limestone was adopted by the African Curacaoans for the outer walls of the Kunuku house. Additionally, African Curacaoans switched from strips of split wood to imported copper wire as a binding material for roof beams⁹⁷. If the African Curacaoan household had the means, they would also use imported ceramic tiles for roofing, like the Dutch houses, or tin plates, because the thatch roofs required too much maintenance⁹⁸. It should be noted here, that purchasing and importing building materials is a European custom, that the African Curacaoans adopted. West African peoples were accustomed to gathering or cultivating building materials⁹⁹. A custom that did not get lost, but it altered too: Instead of gathering natural materials, later generations of African Curacaoans gathered old sea containers and oil tins for construction. Yet it can be questioned if this custom of gathering building materials is a remnant of West African tradition or a phenomenon derived from slavery. Nelson describes the building strategies of free African Caribbean people in the 19th Century as: "free Black people struggling to marshal available resources to build houses that mitigate the climate and signal their status as

⁹² A. M. Monsanto and C. Monsanto-Schuster, *E kas, e kas ta bon traha .!*, UNA-Cahier; no. 34 ([Willemstad, Curaçao]: Universiteit van de Nederlandse Antillen, 1991).

⁹³ Haviser, 'SOCIAL REPERCUSSIONS OF SLAVERY AS EVIDENT IN AFRICAN-CURAÇAOAN "KUNUKU" HOUSES', 1997.

⁹⁴ Newton, Michael A. *Architectuur en bouwwijze van het Curaçaose landhuis*. Delft: Werkgroep Restauratie, 1990.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid

⁹⁷ Haviser, Jay B. 'AN ETHNO-ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDY OF WOOD AND OTHER ORGANIC MATERIALS USED BY AFRICAN-CURAÇAOAN PEOPLES DURING THE POST-EMANCIPATION PERIOD.', 2001.

⁹⁸ Haviser, 'SOCIAL REPERCUSSIONS OF SLAVERY AS EVIDENT IN AFRICAN-CURAÇAOAN "KUNUKU" HOUSES', 1997; Newton, Michael A. *Architectuur en bouwwijze van het Curaçaose landhuis*. Delft: Werkgroep Restauratie, 1990.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

free in a region where everything is overshadowed by the specter of slavery.”¹⁰⁰ It can be argued that the creative repurposing of harbour debris is African nor European, but part of the African Curacaoan building identity.

Another architectural element that has local origins, is the use of fretwork¹⁰¹. After the emancipation in the British Caribbean, African Caribbeans moved away from the plantations and settled elsewhere on the islands. Their new architecture was distinguished by decorative carving of lintels and fences in motifs that have African origins.¹⁰² This is a form of creolization too: the symbols are African, but the woodworking techniques emerged locally. Over time, fretwork became a Caribbean phenomenon through which African Caribbean people expressed their freedom in architecture (see Figure 10).¹⁰³



Figure 10. Fretwork on veranda in Curaçao. (extracted from Green, 2022)

It should be noted that the degree of creolisation differed around the island until 1950. As mentioned in previous chapters, the western part of the island was oppressed through the *para tega* system for much longer than the eastern part and Willemstad. For this reason, the African Curacaoans in the western part of the island (districts IV and V) continued to build in the traditional way of the Kunuku house. This was also partly due to the lack of transport options to the western districts. In contrast, in the city and the eastern part new typologies developed through the availability of new materials and social upward mobility.¹⁰⁴ The houses of artisans are built with imported materials from the US and Europe and are executed with ornamentation that resembles classical European architecture, such as cornices and pilasters.¹⁰⁵

Cultural changes in socio-spatial practices

The African Curacaoan compounds on the Kunuku also had a similar set-up to the Nchumuru's; the main building was divided into two rooms and there were two outbuildings for the kitchen

¹⁰⁰ Nelson, 'The Architectures of Black Identity'. p. 188

¹⁰¹ Green, 'Creole and Vernacular Architecture'.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Monsanto and Monsanto-Schuster, *E kas, e kas ta bon traha .!*

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

and storage (see Figure 11).¹⁰⁶ However, there are significant differences in the socio-spatial configuration of the compound. Firstly, the courtyard between the buildings is smaller on Curaçao than the Nchumuru's. For the Nchumuru the courtyard was used as the central social place where the family gathered and socialized and as a burial ground for passed relatives.¹⁰⁷ The Curacaoan Kunuku compound has a smaller courtyard which was less important, because indoor life had become part of the African Curacaoan lifestyle.¹⁰⁸

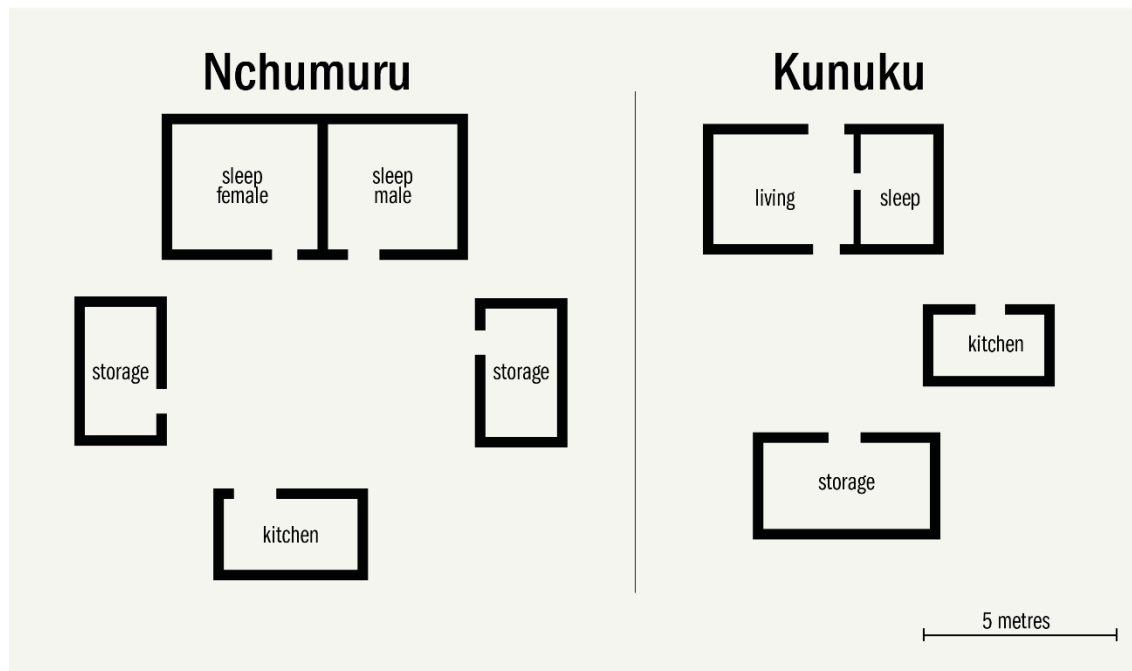


Figure 11. Compound of the Nuchumuru and on the Kunuku. (own work based on Haviser, 1997)

The Nchumuru used their house mainly for sleeping, but the Dutch were used to living inside, because the Dutch were used to a colder climate. The living room, or salon, is characteristic for European housing and this was adopted by the African Curacaoans.¹⁰⁹ African Curacaoan houses had one sleeping quarter and one living quarter. This indoor living is evident by the integration of windows in the housing design (Figure 12).¹¹⁰ The Nchumuru did not make windows because their houses were used for sleeping; their main house consisted of two sleeping quarters: one for the man and one for the woman. Although the floorplan of the Nchumuru and African Curacaoan houses look similar, the difference in the functions of their quarters, i.e. a living room and a bedroom in African Curacaoan house as opposed to two gender-segregated bedrooms in the house of the Nchumuru, illustrate the effects of slavery. The Nchumuru men and women slept separately because they had strict gender roles and traditions. In Curaçao, gender roles were different, because both men and women were forced into slave labour and in general, they had

¹⁰⁶ Haviser. 'SOCIAL REPERCUSSIONS OF SLAVERY AS EVIDENT IN AFRICAN-CURAÇAOAN "KUNUKU" HOUSES', 1997.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Gill, *Een eeuw architectuur op Curaçao : de architectuur en stedenbouw van de twintigste eeuw op Curaçao*.

¹¹⁰ Monsanto and Monsanto-Schuster, *E kas, e kas ta bon traha .!*

the same tasks.¹¹¹ Also, because many African Curacaoans converted to the Catholic faith, matrimony and monogamy became part of the dominant culture. Due to these conditions and new traditions, the African Curacaoan house developed into evolved into a living space with a single shared bedroom.¹¹²



Figure 12. Colour slide by Boy Lawson of evolved Kunuku house (type B), c. 1964. Photograph. Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen / Tropenmuseum (DGZ Digital Image Library, image code 20029787).

It should be mentioned that the spatial configuration of Dutch houses also changed. As mentioned in Chapter II, European tropical architecture is characterized by a so-called sanitation syndrome: extensive studies to develop a European approach to mitigate the tropical heat. Due to this phenomenon, the veranda had become a key characteristic of European tropical architecture. What is unusual about the adaptation of the veranda in European architecture, is that verandas are elements of Indigenous, e.g. West African and Kolkatan, housing too¹¹³. The Europeans had become reluctant to implement Indigenous climate-control techniques when developing their own tropical housing prototypes, yet the veranda had become an essential part of this prototype.

The veranda is also implemented in later forms of African Curacaoan architecture, but not in its earliest configurations from the 17th Century.¹¹⁴ Even though it is possible that West African peoples accustomed to veranda houses were deported to Curaçao, it is perhaps more likely that these people had been deported elsewhere in the Caribbean and due to inter-Caribbean cultural syncretism, the veranda got implemented on Curaçao too, because of its late emergence.

Another element enforced through European studies on health, is the coloured facades. Curaçao is known for its colourful houses, which has been a recurring architectural characteristic throughout the Caribbean¹¹⁵. According to Dr. de Sola, the abundance of white facades in

¹¹¹ Havisser, 'SOCIAL REPERCUSSIONS OF SLAVERY AS EVIDENT IN AFRICAN-CURAÇAOAN "KUNUKU" HOUSES', 1997.

¹¹² Ibid; Allen, 'Di Ki Manera? A Social History of Afro-Curaçaoans, 1863-1917'.

¹¹³ Chang and King, 'Towards a Genealogy of Tropical Architecture: Historical Fragments of Power-Knowledge, Built Environment and Climate in the British Colonial Territories'; Green, 'Creole and Vernacular Architecture'.

¹¹⁴ Newton, 'Houten huizen'; Monsanto and Monsanto-Schuster, *E kas, e kas ta bon traha..!*

¹¹⁵ Crain, *Historic Architecture in the Caribbean Islands*.

Willemstad could cause ocular pain and even blindness. Therefore, Governor Kikkert introduced a law in 1817 making it mandatory to paint the facade in a colour other than white.¹¹⁶



Figure 13. *Kas di Tabla* with veranda. (extracted from Newton, 2022)

VI. African Curacaoan housing types

In this chapter the identified African Curacao housing types are examined by physical appearance, historical spatial occurrence. Table 1 gives an overview of these housing types.

name	time period	location	basic floor plan	elevation	materials
kas di kunuku					wooden reinforcement, white clay finish
Type A	17th - mid 19th century	rural			wattle daub walls, tatched roof wooden window frames
Type B	1860 - mid 20th century	rural			(coral)stone walls, tatched or corrugated tin roof, wooden shutters
Type C	1900 - 1950	rural			stone walls, tile or tin roof, big wooden windows and doors
woonhuis monument	1900 - 1940	urban			stone walls, tile roof with cornices, symmetrical windows and classical details
kas di tabla	1863 - 1950	urban			timber frame, painted wooden cladding, tile or tin roof, big wooden windows and doors
kas di palu furá ku bleki	1915 - 1950	urban			timber frame, painted tin cladding, tile or tin roof, big wooden windows and doors

Table 1. African Curacaoan housing types (own work based on Haviser & Antoin 2003; Fricke, 2019; Klokkers, 1983; Ozinga and Van der Wal, 1959; Gill, 1999; Newton, 2022; Newton, 1990; Haviser, 1997; La Cruz and Helweg, 2014; Monsanto and Monsanto-Schuster, 1991)

¹¹⁶ *Publicatieblad van Curaçao en onderhoorigheden, behelzende de publicatien, notificatien, reglementen, tarieven, ordonnantien en andere wettelijke verordeningen, voor die bezittingen uitgevaardigd in de jaren, 1816-1851, 1856; Newton, Architectuur en bouwwijze van het Curaçaose landhuis.*

Kas di Kunuku

This is the oldest housing type built by the African Curacaoan population since their involuntary arrival in the mid-17th Century. The *Kunuku house*'s evolution can be categorised into three types. The eldest variant, as described in this Alinea, is type A¹¹⁷. (See Figure 4 and 14) This construction has similarities to West African housing structures, namely those of the Nchumuru.¹¹⁸ The walls are heavy and slanted, made from wattle and daub and the roof is made from sorghum stalks. Part of the materials, such as the wood used for the wattle and reinforcement are indigenous, but, for example, the sorghum thatching is a technique and plant species imported from West Africa. Due to the heavy walls, the house had a lot of thermal mass, which made it pleasant to live in¹¹⁹. The floor plan is rectangular, with a wall dividing the living room from the bedroom. Usually, there are two secondary constructions on the plot: one for cooking and washing and one for storage. Expansions were common of the house were common. Over time, either another rectangle expansion could be added to the main *Kunuku* house, or a new house would be built in front of the old, leaving the old to function as storage.¹²⁰

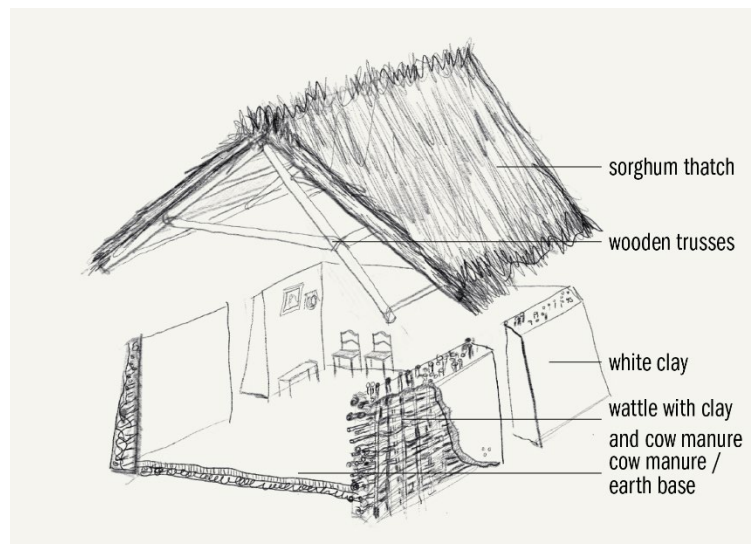


Figure 14. Exploded section of *Kas di Kunuku* type A (own work based on Fricke, 2019; Ozinga and Van der Wal, 1959; Gill, 1999; Haviser, 1997; Monsanto and Monsanto-Schuster, 1991)

Around the emancipation the *Kunuku house* started to evolve: the walls were built of stone or coral stone and were therefore also less slanted. The house also had more windows, which were covered by shutters. The windows were inspired by how the Dutch built. Later, the roofing was also replaced by corrugated tin plates. This evolved *kas di Kunuku* is labelled as type B. (See Figure 12 and 15)

¹¹⁷ Monsanto and Monsanto-Schuster, *E kas, e kas ta bon traha .!.*, UNA-Cahier; no. 34 ([Willemstad, Curaçao]: Universiteit van de Nederlandse Antillen, 1991).

¹¹⁸ Haviser, 'SOCIAL REPERCUSSIONS OF SLAVERY AS EVIDENT IN AFRICAN-CURAÇAOAN "KUNUKU" HOUSES'.

¹¹⁹ Klokkers, *Woonwensen op Curaçao : een analyse van de woningontwerpen van zelfbouwers ten behoeve van de volkswoningbouw : doctoraal onderzoek sociologie der niet-Westerse Volken*.

¹²⁰ Antoin and Haviser, 'Observations Of Vernacular Architectural Diversity Between Curaçao And Bonaire'.

The third type of *Kunuku house*, type C (see Figure 16), is the most modern form: the walls are straight and built of stone material. Window and door openings are bigger, and the roof is either corrugated tin or tiling, depending on the wealth of the homeowner.

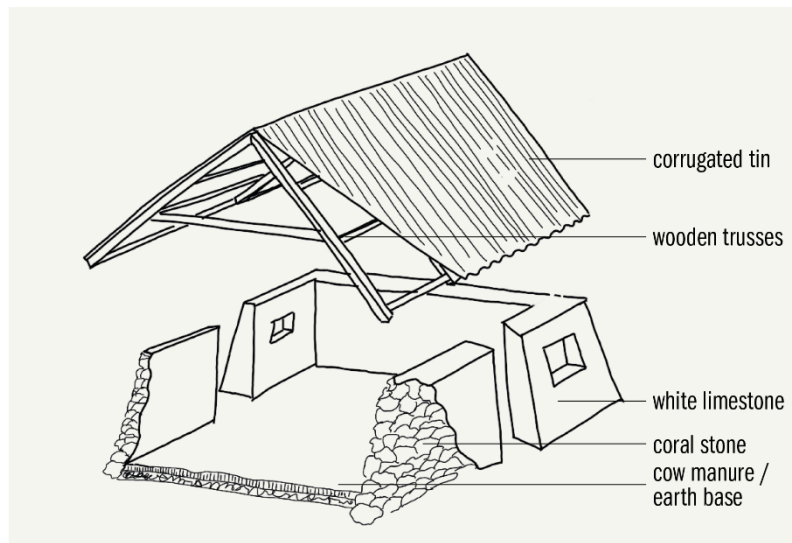


Figure 15. Exploded section of *Kas di Kunuku* type B (own work based on Haviser, 1997; Newton 1990; Monsanto and Monsanto-Schuster, 1991)

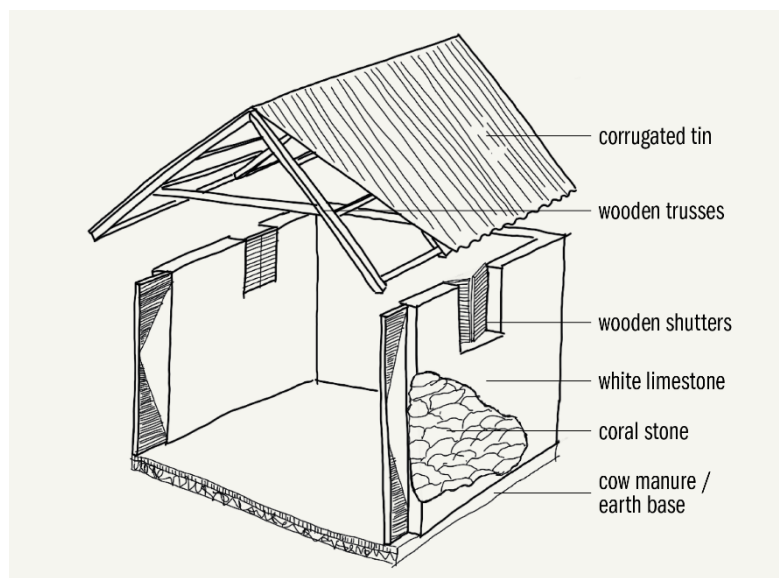


Figure 16. Exploded section of *Kas di Kunuku* type C (own work based on Haviser, 1997; Newton 1990; Monsanto and Monsanto-Schuster, 1991)

Woonhuismonument

The *Woonhuismoment* arose at the beginning of the 20th Century when the emancipated people from the eastern districts and the outskirts of Willemstad gained prosperity through craftsmanship, such as carpentry and masonry.¹²¹ These skills were initially taught by the Dutch so the European influence on this housing type is even stronger than on other types. The walls

¹²¹ Monsanto and Monsanto-Schuster, *E kas, e kas ta bon traha* .!

were made from (coral)stone, finished with a coloured limestone and sand mixture.¹²² The roof is often tiled and completed with a profiled gutter and cornice. There are a lot of variations possible regarding the ornamentation for example as lintels, corners or eaves.¹²³

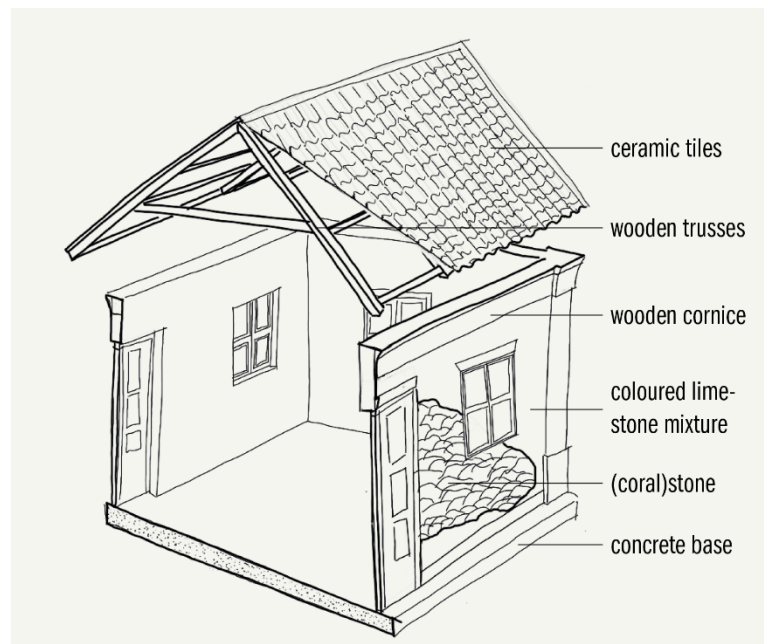


Figure 17. Exploded section of *Woonhuismonument* (own work based on Gill, 1999; Monsanto and Monsanto-Schuster, 1991)

Kas di Tabla

The *kas di Tabla* derives from the post-emancipation period when free African Curacaoans moved to the city for work. The residents of a *kas di Tabla* are mostly wealthier, and skilled in crafts such as carpeting, shoemaking, tailoring and blacksmithing.¹²⁴ The floor plan of the *kas di Tabla* is the same as the *kas di Kunuku*, and the homeowners expanded in a similar manner. The construction, however, is quite different. The walls are much thinner, made from wooden planks attached to timber battens. The wood used for construction is scrap wood from old containers and crates used for shipment. The windows are covered with shutters and the roofs are either from tin or ceramic tiles.¹²⁵

¹²² Monsanto and Monsanto-Schuster, *E kas, e kas ta bon traha .!*

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Allen, 'Di Ki Manera? A Social History of Afro-Curaçaoans, 1863-1917'.

¹²⁵ Newton, *Architectuur en bouwwijze van het Curaçaose landhuis*.

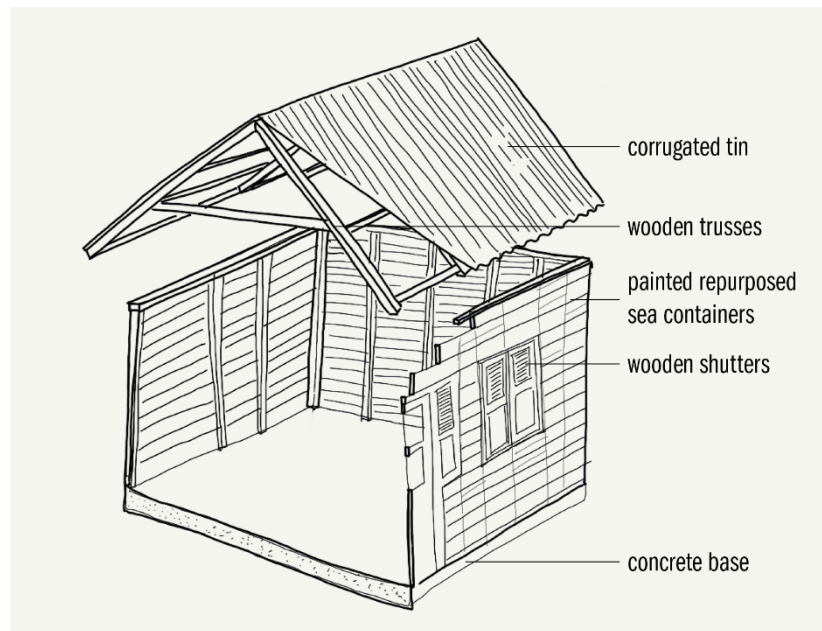


Figure 18. Exploded section of *Kas di Tabla*. (own work based on Newton, 2022; Newton 1990; Gill, 1999; Monsanto and Monsanto-Schuster, 1991)

Kas di palu furá ku bleki

The *kas di palu furá ku bleki* arose after Shell established the refinery on the island.¹²⁶ This house is quite similar to the *Kas di Tabla*, but the cladding is made from oil cans and other types of scrap metal, like billboards. Metal cladding was an effective way to protect the wooden construction from the climate and scrap metal was abundant on the island.¹²⁷ The houses were neatly covered with the tin material and then painted in cheerful colours. Both the *Kas di Tabla* and *kas di Bleki* were skillfully made, but it should be noted that climate-wise, they were less pleasant to live in due to the thin walls.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Cruz and Helweg, *De vergeten monumenten van Curaçao*.

¹²⁷ Ibid

¹²⁸ Klokke, *Woonwensen op Curaçao : een analyse van de woningontwerpen van zelfbouwers ten behoeve van de volkswoningbouw : doctoraal onderzoek sociologie der niet-Westerse Volken*.

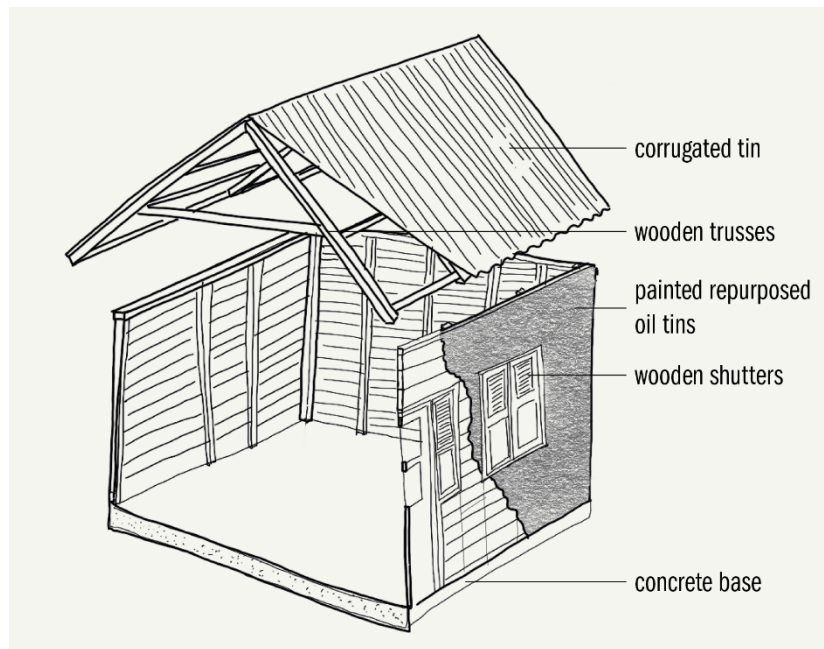


Figure 19. Exploded section of *Kas di palu furá ku bleki*. (own work based on Newton, 2022; Newton 1990; Klokke, 1983; Gill, 1999; La Cruz and Helweg, 2014)

VII. Conclusions

This paper aimed to answer how African Curacaoan architecture developed through the 19th and 20th Centuries, to understand self-build architecture practices that are a result of colonial spatial injustice. Since the arrival of Dutch and African descendants on the island in the 17th Century a process of cultural syncretism has led to the development of African Curacaoan housing types. The first generation of African Curacaoan houses, the Kunuku house type A, shows a combination of African building knowledge executed with locally sourced building materials. The development into the type B Kunuku house shows a syncretism between the Dutch, Africans, and the resources of the island. The characteristics of the Kunuku house evolved through Dutch influences: The Dutch invention of coral and limestone to replace their customary masonry and the increasing indoor lifestyle led to the implementation of windows. Type C is even more creolised: with even bigger windows and sometimes even imported Dutch tiles for roofing.

The emancipation of the enslaved led to even greater developments in African Curacaoan housing. As a consequence of the freedom from slavery, African Curacaoans struggled to acquire their own land, but this also resulted in a new sense of pride in land ownership. Property became part of people's identity. Furthermore, through cultural assimilation between Caribbean islands, fretwork became part of African Curacaoan architecture too. This type of ornamentation showed traditional African symbols used to decorate wooden lintels or balconies. On the other hand, European ideas on health in architecture influenced African Caribbean architecture too, with the addition of verandas and coloured facades to tackle the effects of the sun and the heat. In the 20th Century, the industrialised harbour industry brought opportunities for using scrap material, wooden ship containers, and oil tins, as building materials. Overall, African Curacaoan housing is characterised by self-building, material gathering and creolisation: three elements that have been persistent from the 17th until the present day.

Analysing historical events and identifying characteristics are important steps to better understand African Curacaoan architecture. However, further research should be conducted on

cultural syncretism in Curacao and the Caribbean region to understand the origins and value of certain building methods. Additionally, shamefully many traditional African Curacaoan houses got lost as well as indigenous Arawakan houses. Nowadays, there is more interest in restoring non-western architectural heritage, but as mentioned in Chapter II, in Curacao as well as many other former colonies self-building practices are often falsely represented, misjudged, and unwelcome in the urban space. Building a richer database on the history of self-building can improve how marginalized communities and informal architecture practices are perceived in the built environment.

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