

## Exploring the Nation through the Lens of Baseball: A Popular Culture Perspective on National Belonging in the Dutch Caribbean

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### Introduction: Sports and Class on a Dutch Caribbean Island

Stupidity and courageousness are often indistinguishable in the act of rebelling. How far would they let him go with this act, this lewd and daring presentation of himself in public? In putting on a face, in playing a Colombian interloper between these Dutch West Indians, did he not see the frowns of those in the higher seats and that tempers were beginning to flare?

Of course he did, for while doing his national act as a Colombian he had turned from time to time to look up at them. In a baseball stadium on the island of Sint Maarten, he was sitting in the lower seats, where the workers sat. These, the worst seats, from which it was difficult to see the whole baseball field, were reserved for the poor, like him. Workers paid the same price as the wealthy but, knowing their place, they sat lower.

Pablo, a short and husky man built like a capybara, the giant cavy found in Latin America, was finding a way to correct this inequity. Baseball was one of the few expressions of popular culture in the Dutch Caribbean; Carnival was another, when people like Pablo could sit in the company of his fellow *others*, without having to defer too much. In fact, poor workers could challenge white-collar workers in popular culture sites. During Carnival all classes mixed.

Carnival is a time for poor workers to show that they could *wine* better than the moneyed people—or rather the women could, for real men like Pablo did not do too much wining. Baseball was for men, a place where real men could be men, and show up those *generosamente perfumados* (perfumed classes), meaning those who work in air-conditioned offices.

Popular culture is simultaneously a site of struggle, entertainment, and commerce, a combination that will be developed throughout this chapter.<sup>1</sup> It's where classes can supposedly meet on more equitable terms. It is here that Pablo was seeking to assert himself.

He worked in construction, one of the many men on the island with what anthropologists term “a bad job”: employment that is extremely useful to society but nevertheless pays poorly and is carried out under terrible work conditions.<sup>2</sup> Humankind without shelter is unthinkable, but those who perform the manual labour of building housing usually lack the right connections, social manners, and education to get ahead in life. In other words, Pablo lacked social capital.<sup>3</sup> He was an example of the multitude that exists in every society, men and women whom the well-to-do look down on without giving it too much thought.

In fact, why should the better off stop and wonder about socioeconomic inequality? The mediatised landscapes of knowledge-dissemination—television, newspapers, radio, and internet—have most often told a story of a hegemonic order in which class stratification is how society ought to be. The dominant media in Sint Maarten and the rest of the Dutch Caribbean does not disrupt this status quo in any significant way, it in fact mediates the better-off’s face-to-face interactions with their class inferiors—the others.<sup>4</sup>

But the oppressed are prideful, and in less perceptible ways they disrupt the status quo.<sup>5</sup> They do not fully believe the media-endorsed idea that they are socially and economically where they belong. Pablo was no exception, and with his muscular build he feared no one, even if he was a bit fearful of the reprisals of the well-to-do.

Being brave and ignorant on that warm day on the island in 2016, he aimed at striking back at all those who called him “Spanish” (a generic name on the island for poor Spanish-speaking West Indians and South Americans) and “foreigner.” He could always say he was only bantering and had lost himself in the game; he could always act stupid, for he was seen as insipid; he typified, according to the well-to-do, the foolish and aggressive Spanish as depicted in the dominant media.

With a bottle of rum in one hand and a Johnny cake in the other, Pablo was bent on exacting revenge for the thrashing the Aruban and Curaçaoan baseball teams had given his beloved Colombian team—it had been as though he personally had taken a beating. At the time, he had spewed such profanities in Spanish and English that God had supposedly “switched to his Papiamentu headphones.”

That was how one of the wealthier who had attended the game against Colombia had responded to Pablo’s profanities. God spoke Papiamentu, the man had joked, and the Curaçaoans were his chosen people. Colombia was the land of cocoa and whores and *nada mas* (nothing more). The man said he had had more than his share of Colombian women in Campo Alegre and was planning to pay the brothels of Sint Maarten a visit after the game. The headphones reference echoed the dominant media on the island in how it, at its most ungenerous, depicted Spanish, like Pablo.

Pablo wanted to wring the man’s neck. He had left Curaçao and then later Aruba for Sint Maarten. On this *isla ariba* he was not discriminated against too much. There were fewer poor Colombians like him in Sint Maarten and in the sea

of migrants 80% of the population were newcomers, he was virtually invisible. His work permit had expired, but he was known in Sint Maarten now and was sure to get a new permit soon. And if not, he could go on working without papers, for being an irregular migrant was not exceptional on the island. The island needed good handymen like him. He loved the island, small and manageable. This was a land of foreigners. He felt in some ways and on some days at home. Sint Maarten was also less violent and hierarchical than Colombia. In the land of his birth he was a permanent outsider-insider. This was not his land, but he was growing fond of it, he was developing a sense of belonging, and felt he had a right to speak up. He lived here! Pablo was going to unleash his wrath on that bold-faced Curaçaoan in the higher seats for all the humiliations he had endured in Curaçao and Aruba.

His friends tried to intervene. Pablo should know better than to go against the wealthy, they told him, especially the Dutch ones in their own lands. This wasn't the ABC islands; this was Dutch Antillean land.<sup>6</sup> The Curaçaoan was unafraid and summoned Pablo to "come and play man," as they say in the Caribbean, and "bin laga mi dal bo un wanta" (come and let me give you a couple of cuffs). As Pablo launched in his direction, he was taken away by security, jeered by others that he was a sore loser.

Pablo unwittingly corroborated the mediatised landscape of knowing: *Spanish* men were naturally rude and aggressive. The Curaçaoan uncouthness, on the other hand, went unnoticed. That Pablo had every right to be angry, that his sense of patriotic pride was something anyone would expect from a person who loves his country, was not on anybody's lips. Pablo was simply behaving like a *Spanish*.



Baseballing on St. Maarten, 2010 (photo Perdo de Weever)

One can say Pablo was playing the fool on that day. He was performing anger, but he had lost himself in the act and was playing without recognising that he was. To be human is to perform in the sense of acting out our enculturated habits on a daily basis. This is a sociological and anthropological way of seeing human interactions that will be developed below.<sup>7</sup>

Pablo and the Colombian team lost on that day, but a few days later the tables were turned as the Sint Maarten team was no match for the gladiators of his *tierra querida* (beloved country). The Colombian batters were having a field day as the Sint Maarten pitchers were ineffective. It was Pablo's turn to tease and ridicule. Pablo pontificated:

El Macdonald's no tiene power, el Chino no tiene power, cabrónes. Mira, eso es, músculos Colombianos. nosotros comemos empanada con yuca, Ajiaco, plantano verde, ustedes desayunancon hamburguesa y coca cola, pendejos que son /Macdonald's contains no nutrients, Chinese food contains no nutrients, dumbasses. Look at these Colombian muscles. We eat yams, chicken and potato soup, green plantains, you have hamburgers and coca cola for breakfast, sets of assholes. You cannot play baseball. You no man. You boy. Sint Maarten boy. Colombia, MAN. Mira, [he stands up beating his hand on his chest] hecho en Colombia/made in Colombia.

He knew exactly how to insult the *oldcomers* (people native to the island; locals). The newcomers often lampoon Sint Maarteners for the fact that they preferred North American fast-food to the traditional starchy foods of *el gran Caribe*. What was considered a symbol of luxury, namely being able to eat what the American tourists ate, made them weak and lazy according to many newcomers, and, as Pablo highlighted, unmanly; implying that the fast-food local men ate made them unable to properly perform in baseball—and in bed, hence the implication that many local women sexually desire foreign men.

There, he had gone too far for a younger man, a local Sint Maartener who sneered at him and said, "Hey fuck hole, come let me bust that Spanish mouth for you." Man's business is not to be taken lightly. Belittling a Sint Maarten man's sexual prowess is an insult to the national brand and image of the country. The younger man's threat was music to Pablo's ears.

He looked and saw what amounted to a pretty boy who probably worked in the bank or some office. He asked his younger opponent if he had had his manicure today, then stood up to rush the younger man and his friends, his weapon a bottle in his hand. He was grinning in anticipation of a good fight.

But also in the higher seats was Miss Cynthia. In her early seventies, she got up and eyed Pablo. "Where you think you going?" she said. "You want to fight and spoil my afternoon? Boy look here!" Pablo turned brownish pale, he had not noticed her

before. As though he were a toddler faced down by his stern kindergarten teacher, he stopped in his tracks.

She then turned and eyed the younger man, who was sitting near her. "You ain't Drika boy?" she said. "You has best behave yourself, before I come there for you." The younger man and his friends laughed. He said rather coyishly that he wasn't a little boy anymore. Miss Cynthia stared at him until he said, "Okay, okay." She continued,

He right, look at how the team putting we to shame. No discipline, none whatsoever, mothers ain't feeding they children properly anymore, and I wonder how many of you taking up you responsibility and making sure you children eat right. Is not only in the night when you sweet and you sweet mouthing woman that you must be man. Be man and make sure you children eat right. Make sure they train hard and make we proud.

She turned to Pablo and said:

I listening to you shooting shit the whole time. Shut your mouth. You is a guest in this country and you renting from me. You ain't know who beat Colombia? The Aruban team was coached by a Romney. A Romney. That is we people, the children and grandchildren, is what in the Aruban team that cut your ass. If this was the young people thing basketball or a game of cricket is golden duck and golden goose we would be giving you all.

Miss Cynthia then summoned her two grandchildren who were accompanying her and went to sit next to Pablo, among the working class. Her grandchildren knew Pablo well: he cleaned their grandmother's huge property in exchange for paying next to nothing in rent; thus he could send more to his children and family in Colombia. Miss Cynthia was also helping him to fix his papers, as she was well-connected and had family in high places, including a high-ranking police officer. When she sat next to Pablo believing he was drunk she took his bottle away. Pablo remained as quiet as a church mouse.

This vignette, taken from my ethnographic fieldwork notes, presented as characters in a novel, was chosen because it highlights some of the cardinal points that will be discussed in this dramaturgical approach to a site of popular culture in Aruba and Curaçao: the baseball stadium. "Site" refers to the cultural practices of playing and watching baseball, as well as to the plethora of daily interactions not necessarily connected to the game, when islanders put on a particular performance, an act, in front of one another.

In studying the presentations and contestations of selves in everyday life, which is what ethnographically oriented anthropologists and sociologists do, there is a recognition that no person acts exactly like any other. Pablo was singular in his

actions, as his friends and onlookers belonging to the same social class did not join in with his emotions and actions. So, too, did Miss Cynthia and the other elites he engaged with show variations in the broad patterns of their enculturation. To speak of cultural types is an abstraction never to be mistaken for the reality of social life.<sup>8</sup>

Given this conceptual lens, ethnographic fieldwork, engaging field respondents, and observing their interactions forms the crux of the chapter. This mode of scientific work presupposes that research respondents are always right, meaning that it is the researcher's task to figure out why they think they are right. It is about *verstehen* arrived at through "deep hanging out."<sup>9</sup>

The views of the persons discussed here are based on fieldwork on popular culture and belonging conducted from 2010 to 2012 and in 2015 and 2016 in Aruba, Curaçao, and Sint Maarten. Fieldwork periods ranged from three weeks to five months. Baseball games and practices, as well as other events such as carnival parades, were dutifully attended. Additionally, daily commutes via buses, church attendance, hanging out at clubs, parties, beaches and political campaign rallies offered opportunities to observe and engage with different strata of Aruban and Curaçaoan society. With its focus on baseball and national belonging, this chapter contributes to the ethnographic study of the performance of selves and interaction rituals in the Caribbean.

## Popular Culture as Commerce

Defining popular culture as a site of struggle, entertainment, and commerce suggests that they are always present with varying degrees of prominence. Moreover, the articulations of popular culture in terms of nation-building, nation-branding, and national self-understanding differ over time.

Popular culture is best conceptualised commercially, as the beloved culture of the masses. The preposition "of" can be read as a euphemism for aesthetic cultural expressions "fed to" to the masses. Commercial popular culture as mass culture is in the business of producing commodities and leisure activities by what has become since World War II a multibillion dollar industry. In this version of popular culture, entertainment, via localised subdomains within sports, music, dance, film, games, and fast-food, comes with a price tag.

From singers such as Beyoncé to soccer players such as Neymar to games such as Yakuza, commercial popular culture expresses *outernationality*,<sup>10</sup> meaning popular culture's ambit of operations and the styles of being it initiates and exploits have a limited relationship with the world of nation-states. Commercial popular culture is a cannibalisation of what people in nation-states consider their specific national or ethnic heritage; if cultural expressions *are not* exploitable and extendable beyond

national boundaries, and if the entertainment they offer *cannot be* monetised and transposed to other places, they *are not* taken up by agents of commercial popular culture. Nations and ethnicities, the stuff of identity and belonging, are theatrical props in the staging of commercial popular culture. Beyoncé's African American heritage, like Neymar's Brazilian nationality, whatever these outernational superstars intend, add a flair of fiction or authenticity for mass consumers of their art and skills.

Still, states in the Caribbean can choose to treat commercial popular culture with a strong local signature as a national brand and an asset. It is a risky undertaking but Caribbean states are willing to take the risk. An example of this is the Jamaica Tourist Board's use of reggae and Bob Marley as a happy ideology, in contradistinction to how fans see him as a rebel for the planetary poor, in the touristic promotion of the island. Many of these visitors who love Rasta and reggae will be told by hoteliers and tour guides to avoid Kingston and places where the rebellious poor reside.

The Jamaican government cannot monopolise Marley's signification within the nation, nor can it contain the Masta Rasta's stardom in the sense of mustering the entrepreneurial savvy of agents of commercial popular culture. Still, the government is seeking to attract tourists to the island who are enamoured with the commercialised outernational branding of Rastafari and reggae. In engaging in state-sponsored nation-branding, government officials will have to take seriously into account the virtualisation of tourism, given that the 2021 Jamaican Reggae Sunsplash will be attended by online audiences.<sup>11</sup> This is not the first time that the Jamaican government has tried its hand at nation-branding. In the past it sought to do so unsuccessfully with Sunsplash and other music events. Lessons from the past such as the importance of offering sufficient support to local organisers and getting the hoteliers to contribute "the right mix of public-private investment" are vital.<sup>12</sup>

How does all of this hold for Aruba and Curaçao? Are these islands subject to outernational commercialisation of national and ethnic cultural expressions? To answer these queries, we must turn to baseball.

### Baseball, Outernational Popular Culture in Aruba and Curaçao

Baseball in Aruba and Curaçao can be described as a commercial asset. With headlines in the *New York Times* such as "A Speck on the Map Gushes Talent" and "With Talent From Two Small Islands, the Netherlands Is a W.B.C. Favorite" and similar headlines in other quality newspapers, baseball attracts in these Dutch Caribbean islands positive press.<sup>13</sup> Aruba and Curaçao are known in the world of commercial popular culture as baseball islands. Players such as Andruw Jones, Andreton

Simmons, Kenley Jansen, Xander Bogaerts, Gene Kingsale, Ozhaino Albies, Calvin Maduro, and Hensley Meulens are outernational heroes with millions of fans and millions of dollars. Even if these players are less known in the Netherlands and Western Europe, where soccer is king, Bogaerts is for instance the wealthiest sports star in the Dutch world, followed by Kenley Jansen.<sup>14</sup>

Behind this national brand of Aruba and Curaçao as a source of baseball are Major League Baseball franchises, dealers, sports agents, and international ad companies. The island governments of Aruba and Curaçao play a minor, if not insignificant, role in this branding enterprise. What takes place in Jamaica with Rasta and reggae or in Trinidad and Tobago with soca and steelpan does not have an equivalent in the Dutch Caribbean. The *Federashon Beisbol Korsou* and the *Amateur Baseball Bond Aruba*, the national organisations for baseball, are both poorly funded and lack serious professionalisation and support from their government's Department of Sport Affairs. In 2015, a high-ranking Aruba official, who wished both himself and his department to remain anonymous, explained:

Nothing changes when it comes to that. AVP or MEP it is all the same [Arubaanse Volkspartij/AVP and the *Movimento Patriótico Arubano*/MEP are the dominant political parties on the island] it is all the same. For them sports is recreation, you know. Something for fun or to keep the children off the street. Boy and because you have lots of Venezuelans, Colombians, and especially Dominicans in the little league, because they like to breed, Aruban politicians are not interested. Even with all our stars, they don't see the potential. They blind because they don't want to invest in our youths. All they care about is a photo-op when Arubans do well. You see Mike [Eman former Prime Minister of Aruba] quick to take a picture with the X-Man [Xander Bogaerts], but ask him what he plan to do next? Nothing.

The current situation, he added, is that American sports agents and some Major League teams sponsor some local teams in order to seize local talent at a young age. The players are then further seasoned across the region and the US until they make it to the Major Leagues or a minor league. The parents of the players gladly concede to this, while the national organisation is left out of the negotiations and transactions. National organisations can be skipped because, he complained, most politicians were for sale. In Curaçao a similar situation holds:

Most players going to MLB are youngsters that are being scouted from Junior and Senior League and some of them even from Intermediate League, which is a league between Junior and Senior League.

Still, Arubans and Curaçaoans agree that Curaçao takes better care of their players and their amateur facilities, enabling more talents to emerge with a shot of making it to the Major Leagues. Here is the same official:

Really Curaçao is much more successful than us [Aruba]. On a population verhouding/In terms of population demographics Curaçao has the most professional baseball players in the world. Besides the drive and raw talent the government and commercial support is essential. Once one or two make it, they will also support the baseball on their island with lectures and clinics. There is no one success. To answer your question you have to invest in training facilities, clinics for coaches and players and organisation structure that can measure the growth of the game standards over the years. Oh yeah, and the government have to start compensating coaches and board members. Some can afford to do it voluntarily and others not (car use, gasoline, time off from work, equipment just to mention a few). Everyone can be a star, but not everyone have the means. Baseball teaches you a lot about Aruba and Curaçao too.

### Aruba and Curaçao from the Perspective of Baseball

Ironically, while Aruban and Curaçaoan players represent a global branding of the islands as fonts of baseball talent—a representation that outshines all others—baseball has not received sustained social scientific attention in Dutch Caribbean studies. As mentioned above there are no sociological, anthropological, or historical studies of Dutch Caribbean baseball heroes. In terms of this volume, the question worth posing is what would it mean to appreciate these islands from the perspective of baseball? And what would that reveal about national identity, nation-building and nation-branding, and presentations of selves in everyday life? This chapter is an attempt to answer these questions.

There are precedents to this work, and to doing such analyses, in wider Caribbean studies. The seminal work of C.L.R. James on cricket comes to mind.<sup>15</sup> Through the lens of cricket, James analysed Trinidadian society and provided a rich picture of class and ethno-racial dynamics in the British West Indies. It is via James's 1963 study that inroads were made in understanding popular culture as the entangled triad of a site of entertainment, struggle, and commerce—and power too, James would say, given that he explicitly theorised politics and economics as a nexus. This chapter is inspired by James's mode of analysing society via the prism of the sport that crosses socioeconomic classes.

In the opening vignette it was hinted that newcomers to Sint Maarten, like Pablo, consider baseball one of the terrains of struggle for recognition. He felt that

on the baseball field class and ethno-racial classification does not matter. What matters, or should matter, is winning the game. The opening vignette demonstrated that class and ethnicity does matter on the baseball field. The game of baseball cannot escape from the wider sociopolitical dynamics of the island. There is also the outernational commercial aspect.

Still, Pablo and many working-class members on the island are committed to the ideal of baseball as a democratic place, because they had seen how poor young men blocked from climbing the social ladder in myriad ways had succeeded by playing baseball. Most of the baseball heroes from Aruba and Curaçao have working-class backgrounds. On the baseball field, working-class voices argue, every person counts and everyone works for each other. And the coach is selfless, choosing the best players regardless of their station, because he wants to win. Baseball for many on the island is an ideal of a well-functioning society.

While in baseball no single player decides the game, personality matters. Every player represents the team and himself. The unresolvable dialectic between being solidary and solitary holds. So does the transcultural idea often suppressed in many societies that every cook can govern, meaning that every person regardless of their



Radha Martha, baseball hero in the making, 2012 (photo Francio Guadeloupe)

station can rise to any occasion. This is what the working classes on the island continuously foreground. On the baseball field, individual players are encouraged to show off and display their skills, without reneging on being part of the team.

In Aruba and Curaçao baseball is the sport of all classes, but it is the working class and the struggling middle class that are the source of most of the players. As mentioned above the stars from these islands, heralded in the *New York Times*, ESPN, and the *Washington Post*, hail from these strata. Usually, the uniform is sponsored by a business and the equipment belongs to the club. A good baseball player only has to bring his talent. If he belongs to the working class, this means that he can easily compete with his peers coming from families.

After working long hours for measly pay, single men and families go to watch a baseball game. The baseball stadium is also a place where teens meet to date and flirt. Young, old, wealthy, and poor all go to the game. But on the field, those with less means can prove their quality, making baseball simultaneously a site of struggle, entertainment, and commerce.

The working classes, and those barely earning their keep through hustling and irregular jobs, at a baseball game are not shy to speak about the injustice they face in Aruba and Curaçao. Like Pablo they too speak about being unappreciated and mistreated because of their class position. And like him they too argue that baseball is one of the few places they can contest their subordination and discrimination.

A father who worked as a garbage collector in Curaçao explained that he taught his son to never strike out when facing a pitcher whose parents had wealth and status. His son also had to make sure that other players on his team respected him despite the fact that his father picked up their waste. Anytime his son did well, he would take the little change he had and buy him ice cream or KFC. If his son disappointed and was mastered by a pitcher of the other team, especially if the boy had wealthy parents, he received punishment and was summoned to train harder. The garbage collector explained that he was not alone in this. The teams in Curaçao and Aruba are mixed in terms of class. The rich and poor may not live together but they play sports together. For the team skill is what counts in winning, not a person's economic background. Baseball, in other words, may enable a non-hierarchical understanding of the nation. The class hierarchies on the island are temporarily erased, and so are the ethno-racialised understandings of who is an Aruban and Curaçaoan.

Class and ethno-racialism are intertwined and rampant on both islands. Where you encounter one, the other is surely nearby. The dominant governing apparatus on both islands promote a creole nationalism. The nation-building project in the school curriculum, national festivals, and speeches of political leaders speak to the importance of recognising diversity. Black, Brown, and White are integral to the national imaginary. Within this broad recognition, however, one identity is

privileged. In Curaçao it is the Afro-Curaçaoan and in Aruba it is the Mestizo Aruban. It is a public secret, as an Afro-Aruban working in the civil service explained:

Aruba very strange. When someone from San Nicolaas do good, Aruban [San Nicolaas is a district with lots of Afro-Arubans with a working-class background]. When someone from San Nicolaas do bad, tira atraco and thing, e gaiynan di San Nicolas di repiente. That is why I does tell them, ta Rubiano nan ta. Si X-Man [Xander Bogaerts] ta Rubiano, e lardon tambe ta Rubiano. Then everyone quiet, because everyone knows what going on. No one ever says Bogaerts from Juwano Morto, they just say he is Aruban of like how the Dutch say Nederlander. Is the same up there where you from [laughter]. People in this country like to discriminate. Every country have that.

There is also the question of the colour scale:

I have the greenish eyes and I café con leche, so certain times they think I might just be mixed. That too you have on Aruba, the blacker the harder. *Si bo ta preto bo ta hodigo*. But then again we have lots of educated black people from San Nicolaas. Claudius Phillips is the star [Aruba's most renowned singer with a darker hue] and the girls from Noord [a district where the majority is mestizo and working class] love a black man. So you done know, that can't work with we.

As is the case in the wider Caribbean, Creole nationalism with its politics of complexion is alive and well in Aruba.<sup>16</sup>

It would be a mistake, however, to see this hierarchy in creole nationalism exclusively through the lens of racialised identities. Ethnicity matters because in the Dutch Caribbean migration matters plenty. On these islands racialism explicitly houses an ethnic component, hence the term ethno-racialism. Like Sint Maarten, Aruba and Curaçao are economic powerhouses in comparison to the rest of the region, attracting newcomers in search of a better life. Rough estimates indicate that about one-third to half of these islands' population consists of recently arrived newcomers, many of whom are impoverished mestizos and blacks.<sup>17</sup> What this translates into is a situation in which Mestizo Arubans, as many studies demonstrate, may discriminate against Afro-Arubans, but given the latter's elite credentials and citizenship rights they are privileged far above most mestizos from, say, Venezuela or Colombia. Pablo's mestizo identity did not award him any privilege in Aruba, nor did his light complexion do so in Curaçao. The same went for Sint Maarten.

In such a situation, newcomers and the ethno-racially subjugated employ popular culture as a site to struggle and contest that hierarchy. Attending baseball games in Aruba and Curaçao today one encounters many newcomers. Like the garbage

collector, they fatefully attend games and make sure their sons and daughters are enrolled in the minor leagues. When their children do well, this bolsters their esteem, especially after hearing that their belonging is partial.

In their struggle to belong via sports, in this case baseball, the subjugated nevertheless have the same dreams of wealth and fame as do the oldcomers. Newcomers or subjugated oldcomers who want to destroy the system are scarce. What the subjugated on these islands want is a better position, and baseball is an avenue to achieve this. Excelling in baseball offers players esteem and, if they are very, very, lucky, wealth.

### Part of a Longer Struggle

The tradition of employing baseball as a site of struggle, entertainment, and commerce in fact is not so new. It can be traced back to the mid-1920s, when the great-grandparents of the majority of Afro-Arubans migrated from the Anglophone Caribbean to work in the Lago Oil & Transport Co. Ltd., part of the Esso/Exxon multinational corporation, and the Eagle Petroleum Company Incorporated Oil Refinery, a subsidiary of Royal Shell multinational corporation. Baseball arrived in Aruba with these early newcomers.

After the arrival of Lago Oil and Eagle Petroleum in 1928 (which suspended operations during World War II) the population of Aruba grew from 8,200 to 51,000 in the 1950s.<sup>18</sup> In Lago Oil's heyday 10,000 Arubans, most being black migrants who would become Afro-Arubans, worked in its refinery. As agreed with the Dutch government, the multinationals provided workers with recreation, medical facilities, and education. In those early days Afro-Arubans occupied most of the positions of seniority below the white Americans and Europeans. Miss Cynthia, who declined to be interviewed, had also lived and worked in Aruba and her children were born there. Aruba and Sint Maarten were sisters, I was told by Lydia and Jerry, an Afro-Aruban couple living in Sint Maarten, who are securely upper middle class. They explained:

[Lydia:] Aruba was the best. When I tell you the best, it was the best. Everything you had there. Everything. My father worked at Lago, so we could go to that hospital. It was the best hospital on the island I telling you. A lie, Jerry?

[Jerry:] It is true, Aruba was swinging. Cars. Now I love cars. We had the latest brands driving.

[Lydia:] Wait Jerry, he ain't ask about all of that. Now when you ask me about discrimination, in Aruba I didn't know nothing about that. Is in Holland I was called *zwarte*. Never in Aruba. On Aruba the white people never used to mess with us and we never used to mess with them. But we never thought too much about that. A lie, Jerry?

[Jerry:] Well when I went to the States I realise how bad white Americans can be [Jerry grew up in the US after he left Aruba at a young age. The rest of his side of the family still resides there. Lydia's parents migrated to Sint Maarten when she was in her teens]. They probably had the same mentality on Aruba but they never showed it.

[Lydia:] No Jerry, you wrong, I think many of them didn't have that mentality. My father had a friend who used to come and visit him. An American guy. He had love daddy, and wanted my father to join him in the States. He loved the way my father worked and the conversations they used to have. My father refused. He was a Garveyite. On Aruba you had many Garveyites. My father and Jerry's father were deep into their Garvey. Others were deep into their lodges. They used to read a lot, and follow the news, they knew what was happening in the world with we people. Jerry liked to party and play pool and cars, so he only came to his senses in the States [laughter]. Now the Arubans, I mean the local ones, the apaches [term for the Mestizo who were referred to as wild Indians], well they was always cordial. Couldn't handle their liquor but always cordial. Going to school you used to see many of them sleeping on the floor because they was too drunk to get home.

[Jerry:] They had like they rum Ciboney, like they were trying to get back to their roots. No man they was cool. I had lots of Apache friends. They call me *preto*, I call them Apache. We was good with each other [Jerry laughs; there is a stereotype that owing to their "Indian blood" Mestizo Arubans got drunk quickly; Ciboney is the name of a pre-Columbian indigenous tribe].

[Lydia:] Stop it Jerry, they wasn't too bright, my father had to teach them at Lago, but nice people [Lydia's father was a master electrician]. It was either Surinamers or people from up the island [term for British West Indians] who held the positions. They were the nurses, pharmacists, and teachers. Under the white man was the black man. Is only later the Apaches start to dominate Aruba. That was when we left, the smart ones, when Lago start laying off people [in the late 1960s]. Black people in Aruba was everything. Those with education and manners—

[Jerry:] They had the cars.

[Lydia:] Stop it Jerry I talking, and those that were knock about. So what I saying, is everyone used to stick to themselves, Sint Maarteners with Sint Maarteners, Bajans with Bajans, and Americans with Americans. Everyone was friendly but everyone had their own thing. But whenever I travel to Aruba they treat me well. As soon as they see the passport they say welcome home. Isn't that nice?

To put this lengthy dialogue in context, Lydia's father's friend was one of the bosses from the US who lived separately—in chic and spacious bungalows, in a place ironically called the Colony—and brought with them a love for baseball, which they shared with many black migrants who also lived separately in Aruba, in San Nicolaas and Dakota. Among these early newcomers to the island were a sizeable group of *cocolos*—Dominicans and Cubans of French, Dutch, and British

Caribbean extraction whose parents and grandparents had migrated to the Dominican Republic in the second half of the nineteenth century. Together with the other Dominicans more rooted in the Dominican Republic or Haiti, these migrants were baseball players and could play cricket too. The US had promoted baseball in the Spanish Caribbean in an effort to domesticate Caribbean blacks during the American occupation of those islands, but it became a game through which poor blacks and other oppressed people sought to contest American superiority.<sup>19</sup> Living in San Nicolaas and Dakota amongst the other migrant workers from places like Trinidad, Dominica, Barbados, Guyana, Suriname, Jamaica, Saba, Guadeloupe, St. Kitts Nevis, Saint Martin, Petit Martinique, Grenada, Carraicou, Anguilla, Saint Vincent, Saint Eustatius, and Sint Maarten, *cocolos* too contributed to the identity that would become Afro-Aruban. The influence of the American bosses, the perseverance of the black migrants, and the dedication of the *cocolos* made English and baseball, and West Indian style carnival the dominant modes of asserting Afro-Aruban identity.<sup>20</sup> It became the island's national sport, and blackness an undeniable part of Aruba. Despite the hierarchy and colourism, all Arubans recognise Afro-Arubans as part of the creole nation. This is why Lydia and Jerry, who had left Aruba in the mid-1960s, are still welcomed home. In Curaçao the *cocolos* also played a prominent role in promoting baseball and making it the national sport. On that island too, in a slow process, the children of the newcomers who came to work at Shell became part of the Curaçaoan nation.

What the allusions to Garveyism in the quotation signal is a matter that deserves more research: the role that black consciousness played on these islands. Jerry explained in another conversation that the Americans in the Colony were afraid to play baseball against them. On the rare occasions that a golden boy of the Colony sought to play on a black team, he made little impression. Everyone could witness on the baseball field that white racial superiority was a fabrication.

What did become clear was that due to the role of the *cocolos* a style of baseball developed on both islands that built on what in the sociological and anthropological literature is referred to as *beisbol romantico*, a Latin Caribbean way of playing the game that promotes flair, artistry, style, individuality, and engagement with and entertainment for the public. Coaches in Aruba and Curaçao claimed that there were no substantial differences between the baseball played on their islands and that of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic. It was all spectacular and spectacle, with perfectly delivered bunts and steals that flummoxed pitchers.

Where a difference emerged was that in Aruba and Curaçao there was Dutch influence. According to the coaches, this influence led to more focus on structure, discipline, and technique. That is what gives players from these islands an edge over those from the Spanish Caribbean, who are more unprincipled and reckless. This is why they reckoned Aruba and Curaçao usually beat the little league teams

of these islands. And this is also why the Dutch national team, which consists primarily of Arubans and Curaçaoans, alongside players from the Netherlands, gels so well.

What the coaches did not say is that the islands' recent batch of minor league baseball players have exactly these same qualities—news that pleased Pablo. They are the new Arubans and Curaçaoans. Among the newest newcomers are probably some of the future stars that will shine in Major League Baseball. Many of the best players that the islands have produced are actually the offspring of the first newcomers.

Miss Cynthia's claim, with which this chapter began, that Romney (the Aruban team's coach) was a Sint Maartener, is something that Lydia and Jerry and many in Aruba and Curaçao agree on. Xander Bogaerts has Sint Maarten roots, Andruw Jones has Saban roots, and so forth. Still, they are Aruban and Curaçaoan. Their success is an Aruban and Curaçaoan success, and this contributes to oldcomers recognising and accepting the changing face of their nations. A Curaçaoan artist, Vernon Chatlein, explained:

E amor ku Kòrsou tin pa “The Kid from Curaçao” manera Andruw ta jama kariñosamente, ta grandi. E ta un di nos muchanan di Brevengat ku nunca a lubida di unda e ta bini. Nos ta orguyoso di dje i hopi kontentu ku e no a deskurasha ku su proyekto pa sigi desaroya otro hoben nan pa por haña mesun oportunidat ku e haña.<sup>21</sup>

He went on to issue a warning, because his fellow natives have not learned to embrace the newest newcomers:

Bo ta den kura i pafu riba kaya un Mener Haitiano ta kana pasa e ta kuminda i puntra: “Bon dia Señola, mi por limpia kulá, bintisinku flolin.” Bo ta asepta anto e ta bin limpia bo kura. E ta huza bo harpa, ku chapi anto bo tin saku di shushi pa e hinka e blachinan anto shushi aden. 1 año despues e Haitiano ta bolbe pasa na pia ku un chapi riba su skouder ku un sak'i Selikor na'dje. E ta puntra: “Bon dia Señola, mi por limpia kulá, trinta flolin” Bo ta asepta, e tin su mes saku ku su nes chapi. Otro año e mesun Haitiano ta bini riba baïskel ku su mes chapi, mes harpa anto ku su mes saku anto e ta pidibo sinkuenta flolin. E año ku sigi e ta bin den auto anto e ta pidibo setentisinku flolin. Awe e Haitiano tin su mes negoshi anto nan yiunan ta graduá di Universidat ku Master's anto nan ta manager di negoshinan grandi lokal kaminda nos yu di Kòrsou ta bai solisita. Anto ahinda nos ta menospresia e Haitiano anto konsiderele menos ku nos.<sup>22</sup>

The question is: will Curaçaoans and Arubans learn from their mistakes? They should, since Pablo cleaning Miss Cynthia's yard may have the last laugh.