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THE RITUAL OF
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*They don't know their language
They dont know their God
They take what their given
Even when it feels Odd
They say their grandfathers and grandmothers work hard for nothing...*

-Erykah Badu
Song: Twinkle

This is how I feel about my Curaçaoans.

Introduction

Being a black, queer, femme, woman born in Curaçao, living here in the Netherlands, gave me the opportunity to explore the diaspora within Afro-Caribbean/Latin belief systems within this body. Doing research on Santería in Cuba made me more aware that I can use these rituals and adapt them in combination with traditional rituals from Curaçao that I grew up with, to make sense of reality and to make sense of myself in a new location. This also in a way tells a story of my religious and spiritual life, or how spirituality plays a role in my life.

Background story

short introduction of my fascination

My fascination with supernatural things and rituals started when I was 15 and my grandma passed away, I tried to connect to her via an ouija board. This was my first attempt at trying to connect to something not tangible, something that we cannot see or touch. At that moment I truly believed that it was possible for me to connect to a different (Paranormal, magical, mystical, supernatural) world/frequency that wasn't the one we were living in. In contrast to this non-catholic way to attempt to connect to this other world/frequency, I have always felt obligated, to go to church (Catholic), and I perceived the Bible as a big book of myth. Some of the texts written in the Bible to me seem like fantasy.

Since the first year of studying at the Willem de Kooning Academy, I have been doing a lot of research on colonialism as related to Curaçao; specifically what is the stereotypical image of people from the Dutch Antilles in the media here in the Netherlands. While doing this research I came across videos, books and articles related to the use of Christianity, how it was used during slavery to tame or to create structure/institutions (to manipulate/indoctrinate the enslaved people a certain way to get a specific result) in a society. And at the same time these former enslaved people were not allowed to practice their own beliefs. This resulted in syncretism (the fusion of diverse religious beliefs and practices) like the Afro-Caribbean/Cuban belief, Santería (fig. 1).

Brua in Curaçao

Believing in a magical practice is pretty common on the island of Curaçao, but strangely enough it is still a taboo to talk about it openly (Blom, 2013). The majority of the population identify as Roman Catholic and/or Christian (Groenewoud, 2013) but most of them beside being Catholic/Christian, also combine a few pagan rituals that are related to and come from a West African belief system. For example, the "Ifá" religion from the Yoruba people from Nigeria. Every Afro-Caribbean (Santería, Candomblé, Vodum, 21 Divisiones, etc) practice that is not related to Catholicism or Christianity, is called "Brua" (See fig. 2) by the Christians/Catholics in Curaçao.

Brua is an umbrella term for everything that can be considered pagan, for example witchcraft, superstitions, charlatanism, divination, etc. It can be used to do good and bad. Basically it has a negative connotation in this society, therefore the specialists do not call themselves *hasidó di brua*, but *trahadó di misterio* [mystery workers]. (Allen, 2010)

Some of the pagan practices I grew up with were: using "blous" Reckitt's Crown Blue (see fig. 3) and/or "man pretu" a black and gold necklace/pendant with the form of a fist (see fig. 4), primarily as protection for babies against the evil eye ("oyada", "Mal de ojo" or "evil eye" is a folk illness primarily affecting children, with infants being particularly vulnerable. This supernatural belief holds that an admiring look or a stare can weaken the child, leading to bad luck, sickness and even death.)

However, Reckitt's Crown Blue is also being used on adults and around the house, as protection against bad energy.

Santería

RELIGION

WRITTEN BY: Joseph M. Murphy

[See Article History](#)

Alternative Title: La Religión Lucumí

Santería, (Spanish: “The Way of the Saints”), also called **La Regla de Ocha (Spanish: “The Order of the Orishas”)** or **La Religión Lucumí (Spanish: “The Order of Lucumí”)**, the most common name given to a religious tradition of African origin that was developed in [Cuba](#) and then spread throughout [Latin America](#) and the [United States](#).

Santería was brought to Cuba by the people of the [Yoruban](#) nations of [West Africa](#), who were enslaved in great numbers in the first decades of the 19th century. The name “Santería” derives from the correspondences made by some devotees between the Yoruba deities called [orishas](#) and the saints (*santos*) of [Roman Catholic](#) piety. Many contemporary practitioners refer to the tradition as “the [religion](#) of the *orishas*” or the “Lukumí religion,” after the name by which the Yoruba were known in Cuba.

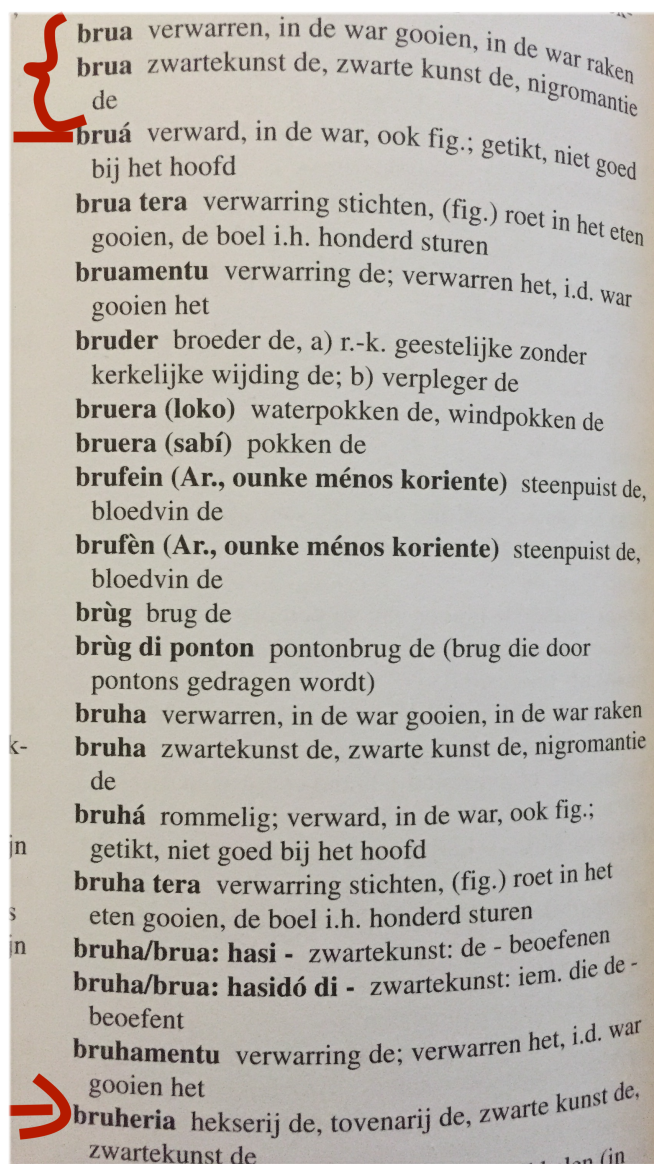


Fig. 1

Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

Living and researching Santería in The Netherlands

Living in The Netherlands for almost 7 years has been really different and disconnected from what makes me feel good and grounded. In the Netherlands I feel as if everything happens behind closed doors, there are so many rules, people are more individualistic, and on the religious area most people that I talk to told me that they don't believe in anything. My reality shifted. This experience also opened my eyes to see "Bruheria" in a total different way, because I started searching for ways to feel grounded and to feel more at home here. Most of these practices are non-Catholic rituals, like burning incense and candles, doing meditation and trying to connect to myself.

Living and going to school here and exploring my identity and spirituality, I notice that in the history of my island, religion plays a big role in forming how people live there. The conversion of Arawak Indians (natives from Curaçao) to Catholicism, the transportation of the enslaved people from Africa with their own religion/belief and the imposition of christianity in the form of Catholicism on them (Lampe, 2001) was the reason why Curaçao is so strongly a Catholic Island with a hint of hidden "bruheria" practices that everyone knows about, but won't talk about openly. We were taught from a young age that "brua" is something diabolical and or warned that you have to be careful with it if you get involved with it. However, I feel like this is the same technique the colonizers used but by incorporating the bible and the word of god to manipulate/tricked our ancestors into believing that the religion that what they were doing and practicing is actually diabolical, and inferior compared to Catholicism. Catholicism was a superior version of a religion for the poor/enslaved peoples but Protestantism was the most superior religion (Lampe, 2001). Catherine Bell's (2009) ritual theory explains how colonizers (Dutch) have used their power as a tool for change and domination, that can also be considered as ritual. She describes ritualization: "At a basic level, ritualization is the production of this differentiation. At a more complex level, ritualization is a way of acting that specifically establishes a privileged contrast, differentiating itself as more important or powerful."

This definition, could be directly connected to religious rituals, in her book she also mentions: "Ritualization is the way to construct power relation when the power is claimed to be from God, not from military might or economic superiority; it is also the way for people to experience a vision of a community order that is personally empowering"(Bell, 2009).

The video "Savonet Museum Films_Santería" was the first video that introduced me to the afro-Caribbean/latin religion of Santería on the island of Curaçao. Santería became something so fascinating to me that I started doing research on the relation between this and Christianity/Catholicism and the connection between the Catholic saint's and the Orishas. It appeared to be the main religion in Cuba, so my research took me there and I decided to go to Cuba to study this personally.

A decade later, faced with an overwhelming feeling of frustration, another priest would express similar ideas regarding a certain community over which the Church had little control. This community was situated near that of Sint Willibrordus, on a piece of land named 'Mondi afó (popularly also called 'tera di misa': the land of the Church), 'kurá di pastor' (the yard of the priest) or 'kurá di mishon' (mission yard)). It was one of the first plots of land that Niewindt received from the government in order to build a church and a school (Latour 1940:7):

If Christianity had not exerted its benevolent influence on the island, a whole population would have become like animals. Fortunately, the Church still has priests who just as the disciples and other preachers before them are willing to leave everything and spread the gospel among the heathens, to light the flame of faith in the hearts of those who dwell in darkness.⁷ [Translation R.M. Allen]

Fig. 5

The elite used Catholicism to strengthen its intent on domination. In 1708 the Jesuit missionary, Father Schabel, wrote in his journal: »The Governor ordered me to preach obedience and to educate the slaves to be faithful to their masters«.⁵¹ Catholicism had a specific function within the dominant ideology. The aristocratic lifestyle of the elite demanded a clear distinction on the social

(master-slave), racial (black-white) and religious levels (Protestant/Jew-Catholic).⁵² The fact that many slaves were Catholic reinforced the gap between the elite and the poor.⁵³

Fig. 6

Field research in Cuba, Feb 2017

The research methods I used in Cuba were a mix of observing, walking round the city, talking informally to people about the culture and specifically the syncretism named Santería, and participating in local ceremonies. Attending a few ceremony there I realized that Santería is a way of living and it's part of the every day culture in Cuba. Everyone there knows about it, and everyone is involved in it one way or another. Just walking in the streets of Havana, I have seen a lot of offerings to specific Orisha (fig.7), and there were a lot of people wearing "eleke" colorful bracelets or necklaces (see fig.8), at that time I didn't know the significance of all the color.

Santería plays a big role in Cuban politics. Politicians have consultations with santera/os to win battles against their rivals. For example: people interpreted something that happened during a speech Fidel Castro gave (Havana, Cuba 8 January 1959) (fig.9) when a white dove landed on his shoulder, as a presence of the Orisha Obatala (the Orisha that created the world and humanity, the guide of every saints, syncretised as "Virgen de las Mercedes").

Ceremonies

At these different ceremonies that I visited, I always felt like I was part of it even though I didn't know any one. The ceremony was always accompanied by music and altars, and people were always dancing. At these moments I felt like I connected to something, but don't know how, I felt the need to move, dance, and so I did. The drum music lead the whole ceremony and the dancing of the person that get moved/mounted (I will use the word mounted, because it's the best way to translate the Spanish word "montar" which is when a spirit takes over a persons body) by the spirit of ancestors. And the altar (if looking at it from the perspective of someone that doesn't know anything of this belief it) looks like the decoration for a party/ceremony. Many rituals I saw were repeated in all these ceremonies, and objects that were used for one ritual were also used for another ritual. There were also rituals with animal sacrifices and/or with food offerings. Rituals to cleanse yourself before entering a ceremony and divination rituals, some of them were very private that I was not allowed to be present in the room, because I was not a santera.

Walking around the city

To be more specific, Santería is mixture of European Christianity, Spanish Catholicism, African Orisha worship from the Yoruba belief and French originated Kardecian spiritualism (de La Torre,2001). All of these practices come with a number of rituals that are being practiced during ceremonies and in everyday life. It was easy to spot or recognise some of these rituals, because they were actions that you see happening constantly, by the same groups of people. You also notice these people because they had specific dress code (initiators dress all in white for a year, all santeros had elekes), that symbolise a their connection to the Yoruba tradition in Cuba.

Other ceremonies I visited used different kind of symbolic objects. These symbolic objects are simply everyday objects with a special arrangement or a special version. E.g. a table with seven glasses of water is something we can see in our daily life, but when you see these glasses on a table (La Boveda Espiritual: 7 glasses filled with water in a specific arrangement, the glass in the centre contain a metal crucifix, see fig.13) during a spiritism ceremony, you know that it has a totally different meaning, and that there is a specific way to act around this object. Another object that I have seen a lot was clay jars (tinaja) and soup bowls both with lids, these were filled with rocks (and other secretive substance) that were carefully picked by performing a ritualistic divining process with coconut shells or cowry shells. This process is the only way to know which rock is destined for this purpose. This filled jar/bowl represent the Orishas. When the normal purpose of such an object is everyday, their symbolic use is marked by prescribed, formalized action, so that the movements and gesture involved also become symbolic (Bull, Mitchell, 2016). Other objects and products that were frequently used in rituals during/on various other ceremonies/altars were: Cascarilla (solidified eggshell powder mix), coconut, seashells, palm oil, statue of the orisha Eleguá (the deity of the crossroads, he is also know as Saint Michael, Saint Anthony of Padua, or the Holy Child of Atocha in Catholicism) drums, herbs, flowers, metal crucifix, cigars, herbs, añil (indigo), rum/ aguardiente etc. Most of these objects and products were made out of natural material. I was told that everything natural obtains "Ashé", Ashé is the power/energy to make things happen and make changes, it is also used similarly to the word amen/blessing.



This was a offering for the Orisha Eleguá at a cross road, he owns every cross roads.

Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 11



Fig. 10



Fig. 12



Fig. 13



Jars representation of Orisha Agayú & Olókun

Fig. 14

Informal conversation

During a few informal conversation I had with a few santera/os I was told of some rituals that needed to be practiced everyday, like taking off your eleke's: at night before going to sleep, during showers, and sexual activities. Saluting your Orisha in the morning is also a really significant ritual to do, because this will help you start your day on a good note, and it is also a way to show respect to your guardian angel/Orisha. Another ritual I observed being carried out/done daily by this santero (he had the Orisha Eleguá crowned) before leaving his house, was doing a circular motion around his head with a machete, as a way to salute his Orisha Eleguá. People in Cuba and elsewhere believe rituals are a way to put our energy in tune with the energy that are in forces of/in nature (Teish, 2012). By doing these rituals every day you will feel spiritually more grounded, and more connected to nature on a personal level because Orisha's are the personification of nature's forces.

Ritual & resistance

After my visit to Cuba I noticed a lot of similarities between Santería, and what we called Brua in Curaçao even though Santería would also be considered Brua. I was wondering even though Curaçao and Cuba have a colonial past where Christianity was imposed on the enslaved people, why is it that the majority of the society of Curaçao is Catholic, but in Cuba the majority is involved in many kinds of Afro-Cuban religion?

The reason why the majority of people on Curaçao claim that they are Catholic, is because (Im going to use the theory of third space by Homi Bhabha) the African religions that the Enslaved people brought to Curaçao/Cuba which is the first space, was not allowed to be practiced, so the European imposes Christianity/Catholicism (second space) upon the Africans, this resulted into Santería and/or what we as Curaçaoans called Catholicism which is the third space, but I think this religion should be called Afro-Catholicism. In my opinion the Afro-Catholicism from Curaçao is more based on what is written in the bible, it is less related to spirituality, but more to how you should behave as a respectable/decent person. The Catholicism that is practiced in Curaçao was never a mere copy of African traditions nor of European culture (Lampe, 2001), This is the reason why I think that Curaçaoans call themselves Catholic, it was a way to hide their practice from the oppressor.

This adapted version of Catholicism was a form of resistance against the system in Curaçao, and in Cuba Santería was a form of resistance (de La Torre,2001). Santería is more embedded in the culture and if you want to be part of it, that's your choice, and the most important thing to me is that it is more involved with the spirituality of a human being and how to make people feel good from the inside, and it is always executed with a group of people, and most are originated from our ancestors that came from the continent of Africa.

A different form of resistance that was used in Curaçao during the colonial period was:

-“Tambú”. The word tambú referred to the instrument, which is a drum, the music, and the dance. It is a traditional African custom. Even though tambú was prohibited during slavery, and was condemned by the Catholic church, it's still a ritual we practice, especially during the end of the year (Allen, 2007).

-Using the storytelling of “Nanzi”, the trickster spider the main character in these stories represent the enslaved people and the other character Shon (Shon, papiamentu word for slave master) Arei, referred to the slave master, this enabled the master-slave relationship to be shown and talked about within these stories. They were also a reflection of the enslaved people on the Catholic and African religious traditions, these stories spoke out against the slaves' situation (Lampe, 2001).

-People also used Catholic saints as a cover for the Orishas. This was not only happening in Curaçao, but mainly practiced in Santería in Cuba. Santería is basically a religion or resistance as these people were not allowed to practice their own beliefs/religion, and therefore they start using Catholic saints as a cover for their practice of African religious rituals and adoration of the Orishas. For example Yemaya is syncretized as “La virgen de la Regla”, Eleguá as “San Antonio”, Oshun as “La Virgen de La Caridad del Cobre”, etc. The rituals of Santería were a critique of the dominant power structure. For example, a white decapitated dove found on the front step of the “Christian” slaveholder serve as a sign of forthcoming disaster (de La Torre,2001).

The slaves were officially Catholics, but they developed their own interpretation of Catholicism. It was a *sui generis* form of popular Catholicism that combined elements of European Catholicism and of African religiosity. The Afro-Caribbean culture was neither a mere copy of African tradition nor of European culture. It was a new creation made by the slaves, who adapted elements from both Africa and Europe.⁶⁴

Fig. 15

The Roman Catholic Church was the prime institution exercising authority and control over the lives of Afro-Curaçaoans. In its civilizing mission the Church aimed to create a Catholic mindset which required that in addition to people adhering solely to the Catholic creed and liturgy and banning all other religious beliefs and practices, they should avoid behaviour considered negative and rather focus on becoming *hende drechi* (decent people). For every *bon katólíko*, the Church maintained a firm line in what it considered correct and moral behaviour.

The different strategies it used in its civilizing mission covered many areas of social life. It ranged from social assistance for the economically marginalized groups and the education of young people to a more direct exercise of control through rules and sanctions, including the exclusion of people from certain privileges, such as a proper baptism or burial. It also included physical abuse of those who manifested obstinate disobedience.

The Church succeeded in pervading the private lives of people in a way the State never did, and in doing so influencing what Scott has called the hidden transcripts. The response by Afro-Curaçaoans to the influence of the Church has been paradoxical. On the one hand they were attracted by the value system of the Church. Abiding by it opened up doors, but at the same time it imposed values which were not always shared and clearly not always obeyed. Some therefore tended to resist the control of the Church in various ways. On the other hand, being a good Catholic meant a change of identity, which implied not only an adherence to Catholic religious beliefs and practices, but a person tended to be moulded in character and behaviour by the Church as well. For those who reached this condition, it had social advantages, as they could be employed in institutions directed by the Catholic Church, such as schools and hospitals, and in that way rise in social position as well. Likewise, children from couples who lived in monogamous relationships would also benefit.

Fig. 16

Santería cannot be understood by solely examining its tenets, rituals, or beliefs. Unlike many western religions, Santería is an amorphous, practical, and oral tradition that promises wisdom and power in dealing with life's hardships. The focus is not on understanding the sacred forces, like the *orishas*. Rather, it is concerned with how these universal forces can be used for the betterment of humans. As a distinctive and definitive Cuban way of being and living, Santería is an indigenous symbol of cultural resistance. If we attempt to explain Santería theologically, we reduce the religion to a "worldview" rather than a way of survival—survival by way of resistance to a dominant culture bent on destroying its indigenous African presence.

Fig. 17



René Rosalia, who studied the tambú and listed its different functions, considered it a way through which the lower class undermined the rules of those with political and economic power (1997:91-110). For him the tambú was an expression of subaltern resistance to class and racial values in society. Rosalia described the tambú as a way of life in which the enslaved – and following emancipation the workers and farm labourers – expressed their spiritual beliefs. He compared it with other manifestations in the Caribbean, such as the *calinda* of Trinidad, the *winti* of Suriname, the *palo monte* of Cuba and the *candomblé* and *macumba* of Brazil (2002:1).

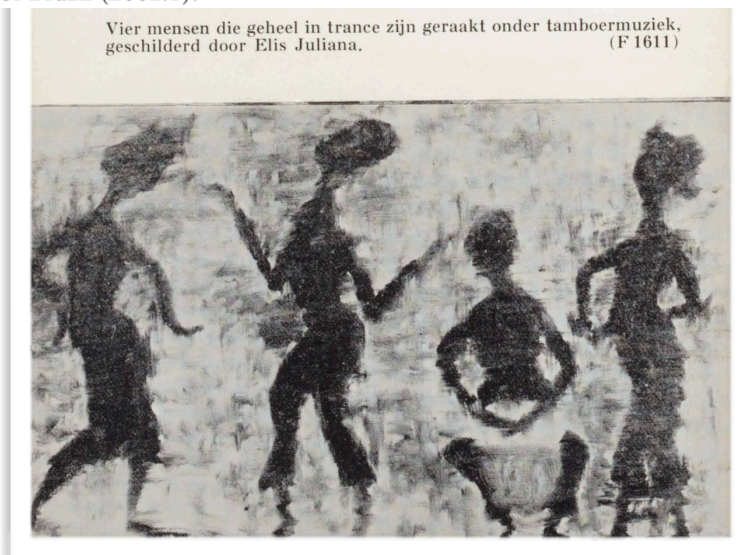


Fig. 18

The theologian Armando Lampe (1988) emphasized the element of resistance within Nanzi stories and concluded that these were not just children's stories but ways in which the Afro-Curaçaoans manifested their resistance. Nanzi, as a small spider a seemingly weak figure, is able to outsmart even the most powerful creatures, such as the tiger and the king, through his tricks and wit. In reality these stories display the wish of people to transcend their powerless position. In this sense they are not only an expression of social reality, but also a denial of it. The search for the opposite in life is also evident in the case of Chevalier, who had killed a man named Johannes. When Chevalier wanted to defend himself in court, he started by making reference to his skin colour and opposed a common conception by saying: 'Even though I am black of colour, I will represent myself.'⁵¹

Nanzi was a figure respected for his quick-wittiness. People attributed to themselves or to a family member the creative resourcefulness of Nanzi, as the following statement reveals:

Mi tata ta manera Kompa Nanzi. Mi tata tabata un hòmber, e dianan ayá nan ta yama nan sabí.⁵² E tabata un hòmber mashá sabí, pasó ni menernan no tabata por kuné. Ni pastornan no tabata por kuné. E tabata manera Kompa Nanzi.⁵³

My father is like Kompa Nanzi. My father was a man, in those days they would call them intelligent. He was a very intelligent man, because not even the district master knew how to deal with him. Not even the priests knew how to deal with him. He was like Kompa Nanzi.

Fig. 19



Fig. 20

Orishas, Orixás, or Orichás	Roman Catholic Saints	Greco-Roman Deities
Eleggua	St. Anthony, St. Joseph, Holy Child of Atocha, St. Peter	Mercury (merchandise) and Hermes (interpreter and messenger).
Ogún or Ogúm	St. George or St. Anthony, St. Peter, St. John	Ares and Mars (warrior heroes) with helmet, lance, and shield. Mars the Victor carries the trophy.
Oxossi or Ochosi	St. George	Diana; her weapons and tools were the bow and arrows. She governed hunting and reigned in the woods.
Iansá or Oyá	St. Barbara, St. Theresa, and St. Joan of Arc	Aeolus, king of the winds.
Xangó or Changó	St. John the Baptist, St. Marc, St. Michael Archangel, St. Barbara	Themis (ideal of absolute justice), had the balance in one hand and a sword in the other; and Astrea, the application of divine justice.
Omulú, Obaluaié, Babaluallé Xapaná	St. Lazarus, St. Rocque, Our Lord Jesus Christ	Asclepius, the son of Apollo and Coronis, custodian of the knowledge of medical sciences.

Orishas, Orixás, or Orichás	Roman Catholic Saints	Greco-Roman Deities
Oxúm or Ochún Oxún or Oshún	The Immaculate Conception, Virgin of the Charity of Copper, Virgin Mary	Aphrodite and Venus, regents of beauty.
Yemanyá or Yemayá Yemanjá or Iemanjá	Our Lady of the Candles, Stella Maris, and Our Lady of the Rule	Minerva, considered to have invented the helm; she created the olive, used as an emblem of peace. Amphitrite, the wife of Neptune.
Naná Burucú (a Yemayá of older tradition)	St. Anne, Our Lady of Mount Cannel	Poseidon, Neptune, sons of Saturn.
Oxalá Obatalá	The Sacred Heart, Senhor do Bonfim (of the good end), Jesus of Nazareth, Our Virgen de las Mercedes	Helios and Apollo, the sun god, custodian of the light and governor of art, love, and literature. He was king of the day and was therefore called Phoebus.

Fig. 20 b

A spiritism ceremony

The spiritism ceremony was the ceremony where I had the most intense experience regarding spirits taking over human bodies, because I have seen people get mounted by Orishas and Egguns (ancestor spirit), these people start acting exactly like the entity that has possessed them. The drum player is the one that leads the whole process. Tambú (drum) party in Curaçao is similar to the spiritism ceremony in Cuba, involving a group of people that collectively organised and/or participate at these event, except from the part where spirits mounted the people, this only happens in the spiritism ceremonies, and not in tambú. Now they become a tradition that bring people together and/or form a community where you get a sense of belonging. The spiritism ceremony in Cuba involves a variety of rituals, the drum that were played was a way to call the spirits, when a spirit appear, someone will get mounted, the mounted person will react to the rhythm of the drum, the drummer will be the one that know if this person is faking a spirit possession or not, because he is the one who guide the ceremony at the moment. All of these rituals they were doing was a way to give something back to the participant and also a way to heal and help the person that has organized this ceremony. Dancing on the beat of the drum, as they told me, is also a ritual that helps dispose of all negative energy, and you will dance for the Orishas so that they can bless you. All of this is related to and comes from the past where our ancestors were using these kind of ceremony to release the stress of working on the plantation the whole day, because they were going through a lot, it was a sort of escapism.

“If you perform an action repetitively with a desire result thats basically a ritual (Teish, 2012).” This is how Lusiah Teish describe the word ritual, she also observes that rituals are practised in a sacred space. This is also a way to connect to the nature and your spiritual self. Rituals are things that you do as a routine, it involves the factor of time, and you do then in a specific space at a specific moment. I have already mentioned the Tambú party, this party just like the spiritism ceremony in Cuba, involves dancing to release bad energy, but now it became a tradition to organise at the end of the year, so you can dance on the beat of the drums “i kore ku fuku”(get rid of bad spirit).

Need to create ritual and how I apply them in an anti-ritual space

My urge to create rituals came primarily from a place of anger. Because I have noticed that Curaçao Catholicism/Chritianity permeated every aspect of (free/enslaved) peoples life, e.g. their education, marriage, etc, and while talking to Curaçaoan living on the island, that a lot of them build their argument around bible verses especially when it comes to the subject of homosexuality. And to me this is the result of the education in schools that is also attached to Catholicism and our colonial past. This is the reason why I think that if we don't do research for ourselves we will never get to know our own history. School are the perfect institution to introduce these kind of subjects. Instead of focusing on the history of The Netherlands, start teaching about our own country and culture and also the idea that brua or any other pagan beliefs are not diabolic, primitive and/or ugly. People from Curaçao are Catholic or Christian and most are not interested in talking about religion (I know that because I was one of them). So I would like to inform them in a way and/or change their perspective on why and how Catholicism/christianity was brought to Curaçao.

During LGBTQI pride in 2016, there were a lot of people and politicians criticising the movement/celebration and also a few flags that were placed on our really well known pontoon bridge (the Emma brug). The arguments that they were using to criticise this event, were purely based on bible passages, whilst the politician Marilyn Moses said that Pride is not part of our culture. Religion was most of the time argument against everything that is considered immoral according to the bible. Everything else was considered barbaric, or diabolic. And this is the why I connect christianity to the physical world, and beliefs like the Santería to spirituality. Being born a certain gender doesn't have anything to do with who I like/love, is only biological/physical. But the bible said that god create man and woman. While in the stories of the Orishas, you can see that in one story the Orisha/deity Obatala is represented as a male figure, and in another story they is a female. These two examples show that Christianity was built around the human, as physical bodies.

A few text in the bible that refers to homosexuality as a sin and that heteronormativity is the norm are:
 Leviticus 20:13 - If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them.
 Matthew Chapter:19: verse:4-6 :
 4 "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,'
 5 and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'?"
 6 So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

My need to create rituals and altar also came from my curiosity of playing with aspects of culture and religion while in a different space. Even though it is difficult to experience and comprehend rituals from another culture that is not yours, because you can misinterpret them, I did my best while I was in Cuba to get closer to the experience by observing and acting like they do, so there would be less friction between the space between me and them. That way I could understand more about what they were doing and what they were experiencing while e.g. dancing on the beat of the drum, or cleansing before entering a sacred space of ceremony. Trying to recreate these experience in a place where these thing are not common, was difficult for me to execute, due of the weather, and there are a lot of rules that you need to keep in mind before doing these kind of things. But doing my performance, installation "It's Like a Sickness", added something more natural/organic and colourful to the industrial landscape of Rotterdam.

Moses MP: "Gay Parade Is Not Part Of Our Culture And It Brings Division In Our Community"



WILLEMSTAD – Curaçao's moral about sexuality continues to be that this topic is about intimacy and nobody should be wandering the streets with it. Just like there was never a "straight parade", Gay parade shouldn't become part of the islands' culture.

Instead of bringing unity, Gay Parade is provoking confrontation and brings division.

This is according to the Member of Parliament for the Progressive Movement party Marilyn Moses. The MP says that Curaçao, just like other nations, has its norms and values that must be respected. Statistics show that 80% of the population are registered as Christians. The word of God forms the basis for the people's moral about what is good and what is not.

Fig. 21

My practice

The seri 'Kuaresma' (Lent) is the last project I was working on. The word kuaresma derived from the latin word "Quadragesima" which means fortieth (cuarenta in Spanish). The fortieth, refers to several biblical verses, one of them symbolised the test which Jesus passed by staying in the desert for 40 days.

In lent it is a tradition for Catholic's to abstain and fast, I decided to challenge myself in the form of penitence by making a work a day. I created work that shows my dislike for the Catholic religion I grew up with, Mixed with elements of Santería which became my area of interest and fascination. You can say that these works were a challenge to the critique Catholicism is always giving Santería, or any other pagan practices. It also shows the way I deal with both practices in my work and in daily life. As it is difficult to let go of, as it (Catholic traditions) was part of my upbringing, and the other was there but not as vivid or acceptable.

Not eating meat on Fridays during lent was one of the traditional rituals I grew up with, this is basically a Catholic ritual, but on the other hand, in this same period there were execution of superstitious/pagan rituals, for example if you get home after 00:00, you have to enter the house with your back, otherwise bad spirit/energy will enter behind you. This was a way for me to spend the period of lent in my way, and at the same time I feel like this was the first time I did commit to something during this period, normally it's just like an obligation, and I don't feel comfortable to do it. But by combining art and a tradition I grow up with it made it easier for me to achieve this. Even though there were a few days when I didn't want to do anything, I still did the sacrifice of making something simple for that day. You can compare this challenge I did with the people that fast/abstain, pray and/or do charity during lent. I felt weak, frustrated, tired and even uninspired or without motivation to go on with what I was doing. And I did this for 40 consecutive days. Working like this gave me the opportunity to work with my frustration and to work against the period of lent with rituals that are not part of its tradition. I was able to explore my options in the form of art, and making rituals that takes my mind off the reality around me, and play around with my ideal form of spirituality, by combining the tradition I grew up with and Santería.

In this seri I've used a lot of red and blue, the color red (and black) represent the Orisha Eleguá which is the keeper of the crossroad between the real world and the spirit/magical world. And he is identified with the number 3, which is also the reason why most of my works are divided in 3 cause it represent the crossover/transition between the subject that plays a role in my works. Some time instead of using the color red, I will use catholic saints like Saint Anthony, or holy infant of Atocha, these are the variation of Eleguá in Catholicism.

The blue stand for the blue product (blous) that we use a lot in Curaçao for protection against evil eye. Blue also stands for my favourite Orisha Yemaya, which is the mother of all, the mother of the sea, she rules all the seven seas, so she is identified with the nr 7. In the works I have also used silver and the Catholic saint that represent Yemaya, which is Our Lady of the Rule. To me these Orishas are the two most important ones, because of their purpose. The objects I've added to my works are also being used in Santería rituals, but the statues of saints that I use are ways to represent the Orishas in a western way, because there are no specific human figure that represent the forces of nature. The only way you can get an image of these Orishas, is only if you use your imagination, because the patakís (story concerning the origins and interrelationships of the Orishas, as well as the role they play in determining the destiny of humanity (de La Torre,2001) of Orishas were only orally narrated.

I have also made collages that documented experiences I had at different religious ceremonies in combination with landscape and products. An example is the work "Mi Eggun, Mi congo/a" which was something a mounted woman told me about the image of my Eggun and how to treat him/her, and I made a portrait of this. Language is also something I use some times in my work, e.g. they have told me that I have "Un negro congo" as my Eggun, "negro" is translated means Black, so I started using the black hand pendant as the hand of the ancestor in most of my work.

Medium and material in my practice

I've been using performance-art and collage a lot as medium to put my ideas out there. Performance gives me the opportunity to transmit a certain feeling to the public around me, e.g. making an interactive performance by recreating the making of a Cleansing water that was used before you enter the ceremonial space, and everyone needs to wash their hand in it before participating. Collages make it easier for me to layer and play with different situations and create scenarios, stories or spaces that are nonexistent by combining things from different periods (time) and culture to make like a third space that is or can be a fluid concept. Installation is also something I create when I want the viewer to be part of the experience, by recreating a new space in a place that is not even adequate for my presentation.

I also use objects/products/behaviour that are all natural and part of the ceremonies I witnessed, all of these obtain some ashé. Ashé is always a positive energy that can be transmitted from one source of energy to another.

Conclusion

Based on all the research I have done related to Curaçaoan religious tradition, Santería and the rituals within them, I realized that even though I don't agree with most of the concepts and dogmas in Catholicism/Christianity and the bible, I have used it to create work that critique it, without noticing that in either way I cannot escape the fact that it is part of who I am. These traditions are things I grew up with, they are part of my life. Even the rituals are things I do unconsciously. Mixing them with Santería rituals, I see that it made it easier for me to fit in this location (The Netherlands), by still being myself and learning new things about me and adapting to the space of other and without any words communicate in the form of ritual.

The realization that there is more culture and religion connected to this research, make me even more curious to go further with my hunt for rituals in the future. Digging deeper in certain of these subjects I talked about, like tambú, and Curaçaoan religion and queerness, and introduce these topic to places where they are unknown to change peoples perspective. Being able to travel and adapt myself to experience more culture and create plus connect to new people is my ultimate goal.

zwart...het is *blackmagic*) En dat terwijl hij tegelijkertijd erkent dat de Santería vanuit cultureel hegemonisch optiek evengoed wordt weggezet als zwarte magie en *brua*: *Ku mi tin mi alta, un mesa of un ko.. ya kaba e ta brua. B'a kompronde? E Katholicismo a keda batie, batie, batie; dun'e [Santeria] mal number!* (Als ik en altaar of iets dergelijks heb...dan wordt het meteen al weggezet als *brua*. Snap je? Dat Katholicisme is de Santeria continue een slechte naam blijven gegeven!) Yubi lijkt zich te

Fig. 21

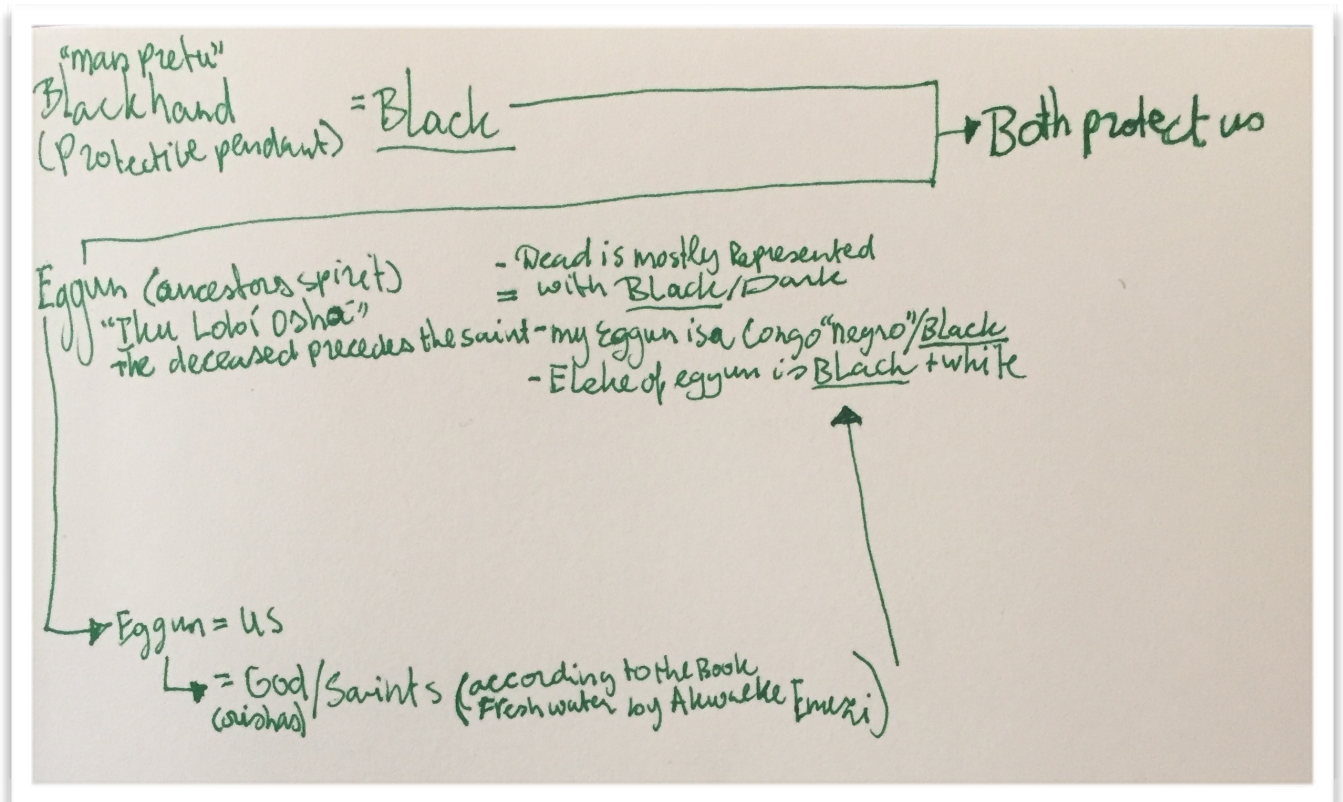


Fig. 22

It's not that we, the Curaçaoans don't know our language or our Gods, but we took what we were given and shaped it into something new...

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