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'Nou koest, nou kalm' : de ontwikkeling van de Curaçaose samenleving, 1915-1973: van koloniaal en kerkelijk gezag naar zelfbestuur en burgerschap

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Summary in English

‘Nou koest, nou kalm’ (Hush now, calm down). The development of Curaçao society, 1915-1973: from colonial and church authority to self-government and citizenship.

The objective of this socio-historical study is to contribute to a better and fuller insight in the development of Curaçao society in the twentieth century. The question that lies at the heart of this study was: What was the influence of the Catholic Church in the development of Curaçao society in the period in which this society was strongly in the process of industrialization and modernization and that subsequently made the transition to democracy, self-government and therewith to citizenship?

A considerable part of this study is based on literature and archival research, conducted in both Curaçao and the Netherlands, supplemented with the analysis of existing oral history material and the execution of targeted additional interviews. These additional interviews were conducted for greater knowledge and to illustrate, substantiate or clarify a specific situation.

The study focuses on the development of society and therein specifically on the position of the Catholic, predominantly Afro-Curaçaoan, population. Given the scope and complexity of this subject, it was decided against a specific examination of gender aspects.

After 1915, the development of Curaçao society gained momentum. In the 1940s, the colonial status of the island became a major focus of debate, and democracy and self-government were introduced. Until then, the popular masses of predominantly Afro-Curaçaoan Catholics were almost completely distanced from political participation. As a result of the introduction of universal suffrage, a new dynamic emerged in 1948 between power and authority and between government and citizens. This study is about this transition: from colonial and church authority to self-government and citizenship.

The study concludes that the position of the Catholic church in Curaçao society in the period of 1915-1973, which developed with the implicit approval and partially with the support of the colonial government, has been of great importance to maintain social order. A link was also

made between this position and the development of social mobility, the development of activities in the social middle-ranking and the formation of conscious and active citizenship in Curaçao. The study has demonstrated that there was an inhibiting influence in this. This was done by consciously maintaining asymmetrical relationships, by purposefully sustaining limitations and applying restrictive measures and, as a result of the impact of this on the population, by the internalization of aspects of supposed inferiority.

Maintaining social order was a desire that gained more importance in the studied period as Curaçao society became more complex and the economic interests increased. In fortifying its social position, the Catholic church from the 1920s onwards did not act in isolation, but with support of the Dutch colonial government in the form of subsidies and regulations and with the financial support from the business community and the Jewish community.

Until the 1940s, the Catholic church played a vital role in maintaining social order and social mobility, mainly through education, and therein by using selection and exclusion mechanisms, for approximately 85% of the population. Class and being a 'good Catholic', or - as a child - coming from a 'good Catholic' family, played a crucial role in this. Thus, for Curaçao in this period, the relationship between skin color and opportunity was still significantly negative for the Afro-Curaçaoan population.

The fundamental nature of the influence of the Catholic church's position on social mobility follows from the fact that the Catholic church practically dominated the entire educational field - and in a broader sense: the access to information - until the 1940s.

This role was maintained for a large part of the population in the post-war period, but at that time more alternatives became available for education and for making progress on one's own in society. In this same period, loyalty to church authorities appeared to be only partially obvious for the population; the connection with the church was predominantly religious in nature. Loyalty to Catholic institutions could not be guaranteed and was under increasing pressure. The limited attachment to the church outside the religious atmosphere became evident when, starting from the 1940s, there hardly appeared to be any social support for the church as a political factor.

In the study period, hardly any social development took place in the outer districts but only in the urbanized parts of the island. The church

leadership in Curaçao did not let go of this differentiation of church attention and commitment. From the 1930s it had a strong focus on the new urban working class and the Catholic urban middle class. New apostolic initiatives that were developed from the end of the 1950s also remained mainly focused on this target group. As a result of this, but also because of the view of the Catholic authorities that the largest part of the population was not ready for self-government, citizenship and social participation, the involvement of the population in the public domain and the development of active and responsible, were not stimulated until well into the twentieth century and thus significantly restricted.

Socio-historically, Curaçao, as shown in this research, is special in many ways compared to other Caribbean islands, other (former) Dutch colonies and the other Dutch Antillean islands. Insights in this late colonial society are remarkable but not seldom painful, with persistent patterns of deprivation and exclusion. But the story is not only negative. In the late colonial phase we saw cross-group support structures with a long dynamic history, but also powerful grassroots networks which apparently could be formed 'from scratch' in the 1940s. Especially in the analyzed situations of deprivation, poverty and dependency, the human capacity to make the best out of a difficult situation stands out. This study shows for example the capacity for selective absorption of external influences, the wisdom of the people to have the ability to make an intuitive distinction between Catholicism and clericalism, between religion and politics, but also a range of survival mechanisms, and the *oikos* as an effective form of living together. These aspects would need more study, based in particular on witnesses that are still alive. A better understanding of the dynamics in the late colonial society will provide insights and building blocks that are important for the ability to develop the current society in a manner that builds upon strong existing and authentic cultural patterns.

The study concludes with recommendations for follow-up research with regard to gender aspects in religion and social development, educational disadvantages and civic education in Curaçao.