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Closer Ties: The Dutch Caribbean and the Aftermath of Empire, 1942-2012

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CLOSER TIES: THE DUTCH CARIBBEAN AND THE AFTERMATH OF EMPIRE,
1942-2012

by

CHELSEA SCHIELDS

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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The Dutch Caribbean and the Aftermath of Empire, 1942-2012

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Chelsea Shields

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in History in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
Abstract

Closer Ties: The Dutch Caribbean and the Aftermath of Empire, 1942-2012

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Chelsea Shields

Advisor: Professor Dagmar Herzog

This dissertation examines the unique trajectory of decolonization in the Netherlands and its former Caribbean colonies and argues that sexual and reproductive politics have played a pivotal role in forging a postcolonial commonwealth state. Using sexual politics as a lens, “Closer Ties” explores how postcolonial ties between the Netherlands and its former Caribbean dependencies have strengthened rather than severed in the aftermath of colonial rule. This alternative ending of empire challenges the assumed trajectory of decolonization and locates the drama of imperial dissolution in debates over sexual and reproductive rights in Europe. Looking to the circuits of trans-Atlantic exchange across the Kingdom of the Netherlands, a commonwealth state linking the Netherlands and six Dutch Antillean islands, “Closer Ties” explores the remarkable investment in knowledge production, development aid and social welfare that emerged only at empire’s end, and views related debates on sexual politics as sites where Dutch power is both exercised and contested. As this dissertation demonstrates, preoccupation with the perceived conjugal norms, gender roles and sexuality of Antillean Dutch has undergirded drastic changes to the geography of the Dutch state and notions of citizenship, variously justifying both the expansion and the retrenchment of Dutch boundaries, aid, and social services. In this process, and however paradoxically, trans-Atlantic exchange has intensified. By viewing decolonization not as a parting of ways, but rather as a strengthening of ties, this dissertation will contribute to a reconceptualization of the end of empire and its aftermath.
Acknowledgements

In the many years that I have spent researching and writing this dissertation, numerous individuals and institutions have nurtured my interests and stimulated my thinking on the issues raised here. While any errors in this work are unquestionably my own, this project would be inconceivable without the support of friends, family, and other interlocutors I have encountered over the past six years. I wish to thank them all at length.

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The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and Council on Library and Information Resources supported a year of my research and provided helpful advice along the way. In the Netherlands, the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research (AISSR) at the University of Amsterdam
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Contents

Introduction
The Sexual Politics of Decolonization ................................................................. 1

Chapter 1
Responsibility and Reform: Domestic Anxieties
in the Age of Decolonization, 1940s-1950s .............................................................. 21

Chapter 2
Sexual Morality and Separatism: The 1951 Campo
Alegre Protest and Insular Identity on Aruba .......................................................... 49

Chapter 3
“Sexuality, yes! Slavery, no!”: Reproductive Politics
in the Kingdom, 1960s-1980s ............................................................................. 83

Chapter 4
Social Science and Single Mothers: Decolonizing
the Dutch Welfare State, 1970s-1990s .................................................................. 123

Chapter 5
Intimacy and Integration: The Ambivalent Achievement
of Gay Rights in the Dutch Caribbean, 2000-2012 ................................................. 157

Conclusion
Sex and Sovereignty after Empire ............................................................................ 193

Bibliography ............................................................................................................. 200
Introduction

The Sexual Politics of Decolonization

On 7 December 1942, Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands addressed her subjects in a radio speech from exile in London. She stressed the common experience of suffering uniting the metropolitan Dutch with their colonial compatriots, hardships that increased the feeling of accord across the Kingdom.¹ Once the war ended, her majesty promised, the Kingdom’s constituent pieces in Europe, the Indonesia archipelago, and the Caribbean would jointly reform the structure of the Kingdom. The Queen—in keeping with the alleged emerging spirit of camaraderie—offered only a hypothetical model for the postcolonial future: “I visualize, without anticipating the recommendations of the future conference, that they will be directed towards a commonwealth in which the Netherlands, Indonesia, Suriname and Curaçao [Netherlands Antilles] will participate, with complete self-reliance and freedom of conduct for each part regarding its internal affairs, but with the readiness to render mutual assistance.”²

While the Queen’s predictions proved idealistic with regard to Indonesia and Suriname, which achieved independence from the Netherlands in 1949 and 1975 respectively, in the Netherlands Antilles these royal ambitions have been borne out. Indeed, from the formal colonization of the six Dutch Antillean islands in the mid-seventeenth century to the present day, ties between the Netherlands and its former Caribbean dependencies have remained fundamentally unbroken. When Antillean delegates joined other officials from the Kingdom to reform imperial bonds after the close of the Second World War, they, too, visualized a

¹ With the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands, the country was unable to marshal resources in defense of the Dutch East Indies. The East Indies came under Japanese occupation after 1942, while US and British marines arrived in the Netherlands Antilles to protect Aruba and Curaçao’s large oil refining industries.
commonwealth of equal partner states in communion with the Netherlands, a move deemed insufficiently anti-colonial by Indonesian and later Surinamese nationalists.\(^3\) Having learned the cost of superseding independence movements through a bloody war with Indonesian nationalists, the architects of the 1954 Charter of the Kingdom of the Netherlands—Dutch, Antillean and Surinamese—ensured in the Charter’s preamble that the document need not serve as “an eternal edict.”\(^4\) While this safeguard intended to usher the Caribbean colonies to eventual independence, in the islands of the former Netherlands Antilles the flexibility of the Charter has been tested more often than not by efforts to seek yet closer ties with the Netherlands, in the process sometimes weakening those amongst the islands themselves. The six Dutch Caribbean islands—the marginal remnants of a once-sprawling empire—have sought redress for centuries of colonialism not by calling for national independence, but rather by insisting on increased Dutch accountability for a colonial past characterized by disinterest and neglect.\(^5\)

Against the grain of familiar narratives of anti-colonial independence movements and European nations’ desperate efforts to combat them, this dissertation examines the intensification of bonds between the Netherlands and the Dutch Antilles from the 1940s until the dissolution of


\(^5\) Historians of the colonial period concur that the West Indies was marginal to the Dutch enterprise. This attitude was most forcefully summed up by historian Pieter C. Emmer, who argued that “the Dutch were not very important in that part of the world.” Emmer, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Economy, 1500-1850* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 1.
the Antillean state in 2012. Crucial to understanding this narrative of decolonization, I argue, are intense debates on gender, sexual and family politics that have galvanized both support for and opposition to enduring Kingdom ties. At critical points in the Kingdom’s history, debates on prostitution, family planning, women’s emancipation, and same-sex marriage have played a decisive role in mobilizing opinions both for and against the Kingdom—shaping its very boundaries and influencing the allocation of resources and development aid. Thus, “Closer Ties” argues that sexual politics have served as a critical site for exercising and contesting Dutch power in a multinational state.

This entanglement between sexual and postcolonial politics runs throughout the broad sweep of the Kingdom’s postcolonial history. But the impact of these discourses—and their purported goals—has not remained static. Among the themes this dissertation explores is continued European Dutch intervention in the intimate lives of Antillean Dutch. This pattern emerged already at the onset of colonial reform. With the announcement of decolonization plans in the 1940s, Dutch elites immediately set about reforming the Afro-Antillean household. Incentivizing marriage and decreasing rates of illegitimacy were to become the primary measures of decolonization’s success. The Royal Dutch Shell Company on Curaçao, which in the 1940s was the largest refiner of crude oil in the world, likewise extolled the virtue of “responsibility” to the nuclear family and work, redeploying stereotypes of black sexual irresponsibility that once justified slavery. Preoccupation with the perceived conjugal norms of Afro-Antillean women would continue throughout the following decades, as European-funded family planning and social welfare initiatives sought new strategies for warding off the immigration of cash-poor Antillean women and their children to the Netherlands and attempted to limit their dependence on social

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6 For the authoritative history of the Royal Dutch Shell Company on Curaçao, see Jaap van Soest, Olie als Water, De Curacaose economie in de eerste helft van de twintigste eeuw (Willemstad: Centraal Historisch Archief, 1977).
services. “Closer Ties” posits that dominant postcolonial discourses have not managed to escape the continued pathologization of the “West Indian family” not least because colonialism itself was so saturated by concerns about the regulation of black women’s sexuality and fertility. In this way, too, sexual politics has stood at the center of imperial undoing.

Yet, sexual politics have not only served to rationalize Dutch intervention in the intimate lives of Antilleans. They have also resonated within Antillean demands for emancipation. For radical socialists on Curaçao who later staged a dramatic anti-colonial revolt on the island in 1969, access to birth control formed a key part of their revolutionary platform. Only through access to contraceptives, they argued, could the Antilles break free from Dutch control. Antillean feminists in the 1980s expanded this agenda and pushed not only for women’s autonomy over their reproductive health. Instead, feminist organizations on Curaçao in the 1980s-1990s rallied the support of Antillean men and women alike by highlighting the lasting influence of Dutch colonialism on gender discriminatory laws.7 In this way, feminists profoundly reversed earlier discourses that displaced blame for enduring oppression of Antillean women onto black men.

Sexual politics, too, have surfaced in arguments for closer trans-Atlantic collaboration. From the repeated requests for Dutch assistance in family planning efforts made by conservative Antillean elites in the 1960s to the recent advance of LGBTQ rights in the Caribbean territories, both European and Antillean Dutch have looked to their Kingdom partner for cooperation in reforming households and expanding sexual rights. Within the last several years, Antillean LGBTQ activists have worked with European Dutch legislators and civil rights groups to advance sexual progressivism in the islands. In 2012, the Dutch Antillean islands of Bonaire, St.

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Eustatius and Saba became the first in the Caribbean region to legalize marriage equality.

Several years later, colorful floats crowded the canal ways of Amsterdam’s historic center during city’s 2015 Pride Parade. Sailing under the banner “One Kingdom, One Love,” a float representing the trans-Atlantic commonwealth—the first in the history of the Pride Parade to represent the Kingdom—garnered the attention of journalists and filmmakers alike. While this festive float with its celebratory atmosphere scarcely captures the immense struggles that have at times characterized relations in the Kingdom, it nevertheless aptly illustrates the general impulse of the Kingdom’s postcolonial history: the negotiation of closer trans-Atlantic ties on the terrain of sexual politics.

**Literature Background**

Four distinct bodies of literature provide a foundation for this dissertation. First, political histories of the Netherlands Antilles from World War II to the present offer thorough introductions to the major turning points in the decolonization of the Dutch empire. Second, an interdisciplinary literature on non-sovereign statehood assesses the political and economic performance of non-independent states in the postcolonial period. Third, as this dissertation takes up popular debates on sexual politics and their relevance to other affairs in the Kingdom, scholarship by historians and anthropologists on the colonial regulation of intimacy and the importance of sexual politics to the legitimacy of postcolonial nation-states also informs this study. Lastly, an emergent body of scholarship revisiting empire’s end increasingly invokes the

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8 The documentary film, “One Kingdom, One Love,” showcases personal stories of LGBTQ-identifying individuals on the Dutch Caribbean islands and discusses issues around social acceptance of sexual minorities in the Kingdom. For more on the film, see “One Kingdom, One Love,” http://www.onekingdom.nl/index.php.
so-called “federal moment,” the decade immediately following the Second World War wherein colonies of the British, French and Dutch empires weighed the possibility of imperial integration over national territorial sovereignty. In conjoining these frequently divided bodies of literature, this dissertation seeks to illuminate not only the political processes whereby non-sovereignty was deliberately achieved in the Antilles, but also how this often-ambiguous situation was popularly negotiated and experienced.

Political histories dominate the extant literature on the postcolonial Dutch Caribbean. A three-part reference work co-authored by historians Gert Oostindie and Inge Klinkers outlines the political developments within the Kingdom from 1940-2010 and provides a detailed understanding of the Charter—its obligations and limitations—as well as a thorough description of Dutch and Antillean political cultures. The shortened English translation of this work highlights Dutch policies in comparative perspective and includes an abbreviated assessment of past and present cultural connections between the Dutch and the Caribbean. Additionally, legal scholar Steven Hillebrink’s important book analyzes the Charter alongside United Nations policy on decolonization. Hillebrink concludes that the Charter and the voluntary association of former colonies with the metropole satisfy UN protocol. While these works serve as an indispensable introduction to the major turning points throughout the past seventy years of Antillean history,

they are more valuable for their exhaustive archival research rather than their conceptual ingenuity. Oostindie and Klinkers’ conception of the Antilles as a “stagnated model of decolonization” continues to measure the Antilles against the more normative models of decolonization resulting in national territorial sovereignty. Further, while the authors under discussion frequently reference the Antillean rejection of independence, they do so without providing much of a flavor of the surrounding debates, as if the desire to access the benefits of metropolitan citizenship were as self-evident as the desire, in other parts of the postcolonial world, for independence and self-sovereignty. As anthropologist Francio Guadeloupe remarks, one cannot assume that the only plausible explanation for rejecting national independence rests on economic calculations. Only through a deeper reading of Antillean arguments for non-sovereignty—and metropolitan agendas pushing for its antithesis—can we reach a fuller understanding of how imperial bonds are sustained, revitalized and ultimately transformed.

Multi-disciplinary scholarship on non-sovereign statehood has focused on the political and economic advantages of non-independence. Godfrey Baldacchino and David Milne’s *The Case for Non-Sovereignty* stresses the economic benefits and enhanced stability experienced by autonomous rather than independent states. Supporting this assessment, Peter Clegg and Emilio Pantojas-García argue against the tendency to evaluate non-self governing states according to capacity for eventual self-rule or, alternatively, by the degree to which they continue to resemble colonies. Lammert de Jong echoes this call and, in various works, argues that non-sovereign

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11 Best explicated in Oostindie and Klinkers, *Decolonising the Caribbean*, 86. Their most recent work, *Gedeeld Koninkrijk: De Ontmanteling Van De Nederlandse Antillen en de Vernieuwing Van De Trans-Atlantische Relaties* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012) analyzes the political restructuring of the former Netherlands Antilles from the initial limited referendum on St Maarten in 2004 to the dissolution of the Netherlands Antilles in 2010.
13 Eds. Peter Clegg and Emilio Pantojas-García, introduction to *Governance in the Non-Independent*
states should be evaluated on their own terms and according to their own political dynamics, not as “failed” examples of decolonization stuck in “the halfway house” between colonialism and independence.\textsuperscript{14}

Following these authors, “Closer Ties” does not address questions of how and to what extent the Antillean islands remain “colonies” of the Netherlands and does not assess the viability for eventual sovereignty. However, this dissertation probes further beyond the bureaucratic processes and economic outcomes spotlighted in these studies to consider other sites of contestation and popular engagement—including especially those over sexual freedoms. Why did sexual politics become such an important battleground for sorting out familiar postcolonial conflicts over citizenship, identity and belonging? Here, I build on previous studies of colonialism, slavery and the regulation of intimacy that maintained both systems. I argue that sexual politics have factored significantly into postcolonial relations not least because the regulation of sexuality was a central component of the colonial and slavery past. Histories of the colonial regulation of sexuality in the Dutch empire most often center on the Dutch East Indies, and the work of Ann Laura Stoler has been instructive for students of colonialism writ large, drawing critical attention to the ways in which the regulation of intimacy helped to create and maintain racial hierarchies in the colonies.\textsuperscript{15} Studies of race and slavery in the Americas have

also reinforced the interdependency of hardening understandings of race, gender and sexuality.\textsuperscript{16} As Jennifer Morgan has demonstrated, racial slavery was ideologically constituted by connecting gender and sexual deviance to blackness. Further, enslaved women’s labor and reproductive capacity determined the value of black female life in the Americas.\textsuperscript{17} While scholars have attended to the intersections among race, class and gender in the establishment of colonial societies and racial hierarchies, fewer studies examine how these intimate entanglements played out in the era of decolonization.\textsuperscript{16} The enduring ties of the Kingdom thus offer a useful handle for considering the afterlife of the colonial regulation of sexuality.

Interdisciplinary studies on Caribbean sexuality also inform this dissertation.\textsuperscript{19} In particular, I am indebted to the work of feminist scholar M. Jacqui Alexander, which illustrates how the sexually conservative nationalisms of 1960s Caribbean nation-states sought to rebut colonial stereotypes of the hypersexual and untamed West Indian subject that had long

\textsuperscript{16} The literature on slavery in the Dutch Caribbean has, for the most part, not addressed issues of gender and sexuality. The notable exception is Gloria Wekker’s important study, \textit{The Politics of Passion: Women’s Sexual Culture in the Afro-Surinamese Diaspora} (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006). The historiography on slavery in the Dutch Atlantic is a highly divided field, with intense disagreements between historians focused on empirical archival studies and those interdisciplinary scholars who believe the experiences of enslaved people—and subsequent legacies of trauma—must be explored beyond the official knowledge of the archive. Notable studies of the former group include, Johannes Menne Postma, \textit{The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1600-1815} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) and Emmer, \textit{The Dutch in the Atlantic Economy, 1500-1850}. Works representative of the latter strain in the literature include, Alex van Stipriaan, et al. \textit{Op Zoek Naar de Stilte} and Kwame Nimako and Glenn Willemsen, \textit{The Dutch Atlantic: Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation} (London: Pluto Press, 2011).


legitimized British control. Such studies of sexuality in the Caribbean region offer helpful ways for thinking beyond the dominant framing of the region as both hypersexual and conservative, and usefully illuminate how concern with sexuality factored into the process of postcolonial nation building. However, with the exception of sociologist Kamala Kempadoo’s widely-cited research on sex tourism in the Dutch Caribbean and anthropologist Gloria Wekker’s important study on female same-sex desire in Suriname, Caribbean territories in the Dutch orbit have rarely factored into studies of Caribbean sexuality. Although “Closer Ties” is not centrally concerned with sexual subjectivities of Antillean Dutch, this dissertation does make a contribution to understandings of the ways in which sexuality and gender influenced the construction of citizenship in the Dutch Caribbean, a region that scholar Rosamond King has described as the “most neglected” in Caribbean studies. “Closer Ties” fills this gap by placing the Dutch islands in conversation with broader postcolonial and regional developments.

This dissertation evaluates the intersection of sexual politics and postcoloniality in the Caribbean alongside contemporaneous debates over sexual freedoms and citizenship in Europe. As European self-definition increasingly embraced more sexually progressive values — particularly in the Netherlands, where this discourse was most often pitted against allegedly

24 Rosamond King, Island Bodies: Transgressive Sexualities in the Caribbean Imagination (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2014). King incorporates the Dutch islands in her study of Caribbean sexuality, but concedes that much work remains to be done by those with a better understanding of Dutch and Papiamentu.
conservative and homophobic Muslims\textsuperscript{26} —Dutch perception of its Caribbean counterparts has shifted from the hypersexual to the hyper-conservative. While much interesting scholarship exists on the rebranding of European identities and its consequences for notions of citizenship and belonging, fewer studies examine how this shift in European moral regimes intersected with ongoing intervention in the former colonial world.\textsuperscript{27} Nevertheless, literature on the contemporary debates over European inclusion provides a crucial background for understanding recent Dutch efforts to expand sexual freedoms in the Caribbean, treading on traditions of Antillean autonomy.

Finally, this dissertation builds on an exciting new body of scholarship that problematizes the nation-state as the inevitable end of empire. Scholars of postcolonialism have increasingly emphasized the embattled state of postcolonial sovereignty. Jean and John L. Comaroff lament this transformation of the postcolonial state into a “palimpsest of contested sovereignties,” whose current fragility results from the increased interference of multinational corporations, paramilitary groups, and the deregulation of the state.\textsuperscript{28} Similarly, Ann Stoler has insisted that scholars of postcolonialism shift attention to contemporary “imperial formations,” sets of relations characterized not least by the “scaled genres of rule that produce and count on different degrees of sovereignty and gradations of rights.”\textsuperscript{29} This emphasis on the heightening fragility of postcolonial sovereignty, however, neglects to take into account how the architects of non-self-governing states have deliberately and strategically sought to strike a balance between autonomy


and cooperation. In this way, the recurrent disavowal of independence in the Antilles must be evaluated according to how actors made sense of the changed circumstances of the postwar and postcolonial world and made strategic if also circumscribed decisions about the nature of state sovereignty.

In his many works on Francophone Africa, Frederick Cooper argues that federalism prevailed over the nation-state in the brief but important period between 1945-1960. Pointing to Senegalese leader Léopold Sédar Senghor’s stated fear of the “balkanization” of French West Africa – the breaking up of African territories into small, resource-poor independent states – Cooper demonstrates how African and French leaders sought to maintain imperial unity while substantively reforming the bonds between metropole and colony. Between 1946-1960, these leaders pursued federalism among former colonial and metropolitan territories and in the process redefined imperial citizenship. Further, Cooper maintains that notions of republican citizenship and universal rights were not mere French imports intended to seduce African elites into accepting continued inferiority. Rather, these ideas were given new meaning in French Africa.

Alternatively, Gary Wilder’s *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization, and the Future of the World* traces the attempts by Senghor and Martinican statesman and poet Aimé Césaire to envision non-national forms of decolonization, offering an extended meditation on the meaning of freedom in the postwar opening. Contrary to Cooper, Wilder’s interest is not in resuscitating federalism as an attractive alternative to the nation-state, but in situating both Césaire and Senghor’s formulation of “self-determination without state sovereignty” in the complexities of

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the postwar moment, a moment where the solutions for realizing colonial emancipation and human freedom were neither obvious nor predetermined. Although the advent of decolonization raised new demands for emancipatory political programs, Wilder shows how Césaire and Senghor looked to both past ideals and future utopias in their effort to not simply reconstitute postcolonial relations but to envision a new global order more broadly.

Above all, newly emerging studies of decolonization—whether envisioned or realized—show the many and often competing versions of anti-colonialism that emerged after the Second World War. This dissertation builds off of Cooper’s work in challenging the nation-state as the inevitable endpoint of empire at the same time that it offers an alternative history of federalism that did not expire or fail but, to the contrary, remains powerfully intact to this day. The history of the Dutch Antilles therefore offers a compelling opportunity for exploring and theorizing this colonial aftermath over the longue durée. Drawing on Wilder’s attention to the promises, challenges and contradictions of colonial emancipation, this dissertation engages debates on sexual politics as sites where precisely these struggles have been registered and processed in the postcolonial Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Chapter Outline and Archival Sources

Exploring the entire sweep of the postcolonial period, chapters move chronologically from the announcement of imperial reform in 1942 to the aftermath of Antillean dissolution in 2012. These chapters cohere around political, social and economic episodes that have bound the Antilles and the Netherlands in ever-closer relations, and highlight the discussions on sexual,

gender and family politics that have punctuated the process of strengthening postcolonial ties. In its consideration of the political construction and social negotiation of non-sovereignty, “Closer Ties” makes use of a diverse amalgam of government sources and popular ephemera spanning repositories in the Netherlands, Curaçao, Aruba and St. Maarten.

Chapter One examines the wartime transformation of Curaçao, then capital of the Netherlands Antilles, into a crucial location within the world oil economy and the emphasis on public morality that emerged at the nexus of industrialization and decolonization. Responding to the rapid transformations of Curaçaoan society in the 1940s and 1950s, elites in the late-colonial government, Catholic Church, and Royal Dutch Shell Company each sought to enhance “responsibility” and “discipline” among Afro-Caribbeans entering the industrial workforce and civic society. Each emphasized the importance of marriage and household organization based on the nuclear family as requisites for political autonomy and economic modernization. In this way, the transition from colonialism to autonomous statehood occurred in important measure on the intimate terrain of the household. The minutes of the Estates General, a nominally elected colonial council in the Netherlands Antilles, forms a major source base for this chapter. The Leiden University Library (Universiteitaire Bibliotheken Leiden) houses these documents in the collection of the Royal Tropical Institute (Koninklijke Instituut voor de Tropen). These sources underscore the acute concerns about marriage and divorce that arose during World War II. The late-colonial government, however, shared these anxieties with powerful allies on Curaçao. While the archives of the Royal Dutch Shell Company are not accessible to scholars, Shell’s monthly workers publication, De Passaat, documents many of the major changes to the company’s social welfare programs. Volumes of De Passaat can be accessed at the Public Library of Curaçao in the National Documents (Dokumento Nashonal) collection. Finally, the
records of the Dominican order are maintained at the *Erfgoed Centrum Kloosterleven* in Sint Agatha, the Netherlands. These archives offer valuable insights into the Catholic mission on Curaçao and reveal the tensions emerging within the Catholic Church on Curaçao in the 1950s, as growing industrialization and secularization threatened the historic role of the Church. The Church, too, would proclaim its continued social relevance by making new suggestions about the reform of the Afro-Antillean household.

Chapter Two examines how anxieties about the erosion of popular morality spilled over into public spaces. On the island of Aruba in the 1950s, impassioned protests against a state-run brothel erupted as the island’s US-owned oil refinery entered a period of terminal decline. This chapter focuses in particular on the protest movement’s articulation of a distinct Aruban identity characterized by claims to whiteness and a restrained sexual morality. This insular identity, I argue, was formed not in reaction to the Netherlands but to neighboring Curaçao—site of the first state-run brothel and the dominant force within Antillean politics—as well as in response to the presence of thousands of Afro-Caribbean laborers who immigrated to Aruba in the 1940s and 1950s. Drawing linkages between the protest movement and emerging demands for Aruban separation from the Netherlands Antilles, I examine how racial and sexual politics underpinned the successful mobilization of an insular identity on Aruba and argue that antagonisms between former colonies at times eclipsed even those between metropole and colony. Often-underutilized sources from the National Library and National Archive of Aruba form the source base for this chapter. Housed in the National Archive, documents from the island council of Aruba in the 1950s reveal how popular pressure compelled elites to abolish plans for regulating prostitution. This is remarkable not least because the democratic structures of the Kingdom were largely untested. Indeed, the protest erupted on the eve of the first-ever island council elections, and
representatives first clashed with their constituents on the topic of sexual morality. At the National Library of Aruba in the Aruban/Antillean collection, a scrapbook kept by a priest affiliated with the protest movement offered a crucial window into the rhetoric and strategies of the protest movement. The posters, pamphlets, photographs and press clippings maintained there highlight the movement’s savvy negotiation of various layers of Kingdom authority: from making demands of the insular government, to petitioning the Dutch Queen.

Chapter Three analyzes how reproductive rights and women’s emancipation factored into the political imaginaries of the 1960s-1970s. Fears of overpopulation in the Antilles galvanized some elites to call on the help of Dutch development aid to promote family planning across the islands. At the same time, actors within the Antillean left, including radical union leaders, socialist groups, and anti-colonial feminists of color, viewed the extension of reproductive rights as vital to securing independence from the Netherlands and abolishing economic and racial inequality. In the aftermath of a violent anti-colonial uprising on Curaçao in 1969, and in an attempt to distance themselves from their colonial image, the Dutch government abruptly withdrew development aid for family planning projects. This chapter thus considers discourses on reproductive rights and women’s sexuality as a venue for overcoming and working through the legacies of colonialism. Several distinct bodies of sources inform this study. A partial record of Curaçao’s family planning clinic, Famia Planea, is kept in the archive of the Cabinet of the Vice Minister President for Surinamese and Netherlands Antillean Affairs (Het Kabinet van de Vice-Minister-President voor Surinaamse en Nederlands-Antillaanse Zaken) in the National Archive of the Netherlands. These files offer surprising insight into the broad coalition of actors that supported Famia Planea’s rhetoric of “responsible parenting,” and the Dutch government’s sudden retreat from family planning campaigns in the aftermath of revolution. Journals from
prominent Antillean leftist groups housed in the International Institute of Social History (Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis) in Amsterdam show a continuous thread connecting birth control and sexual emancipation to the struggle for Antillean independence. Curaçaoan feminists would later join in on this conversation. The records of the most prominent feminist organization, the Union di Muhé Antiano (UMA), can be found in the National Archive of Curaçao. UMA’s records show how Curaçaoan feminists brought together the causes of anti-imperialism and gender equality in order to form a mass movement involving Antillean men and women alike.

Chapter Four considers how concerns about reproduction shifted theaters to the European Netherlands throughout the 1970s-1990s. With unprecedented numbers of Antillean Dutch immigrating to the Netherlands in that time period, European Dutch policy makers, welfare providers and social workers focused special attention on the alleged eccentricities of the Antillean household and called on social scientists to study connections between single parenthood and welfare reliance. Although Antillean activists insisted robust social welfare would play a critical role in the emancipation of the Antillean community at home and abroad, by the 1990s, Dutch politicians reduced the social safety net in part by claiming that Antillean single mothers were abusing the Dutch welfare state. Above all, this chapter asserts that the production of knowledge and its corollary application in development schemes—often regarded as defining characteristics of the colonial project—emerged in new ways at empire’s end in the Netherlands and Netherlands Antilles. Further, the results of this emerging expertise on Antillean families powerfully racialized the very concept of welfare and served to solidify notions of difference between European and Antillean Dutch at a moment when family norms were themselves radically contested within mainstream Dutch society. Looking to municipal
sources from the city of Amsterdam housed at the *Gemeente Amsterdam Stadsarchief* offers insight into the major concerns that rocked welfare providers and social services departments in the era of mass migration. The studies that these and other civil servants commissioned, which focus excessively on the female-headed household, are located in the collections of the Royal Netherlands Institute for Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (*Koninklijke Instituut voor Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde*) at the Leiden University Library, which likewise offers access to the journals and newsletters of Antillean social welfare organizations based in the Netherlands. Reading across these sources reveals how Antillean single mothers took on a symbolic role in arguments for the expansion and retrenchment of the Dutch welfare state.

Finally, Chapter Five analyzes how debates on LGBTQ rights have factored into the restructuring of the Kingdom in the 2000s, which resulted most dramatically in the absorption of three Antillean islands into the Dutch state. The legalization of same-sex marriage in the new Dutch municipalities of Bonaire, Saba and St. Eustatius in 2012 mobilized a homegrown Antillean LGBTQ-rights movement at the same time that it galvanized extreme opposition to Dutch “re-colonization.” Similarly, European Dutch politicians incorporated these new municipalities in uneven ways: on the one hand insisting on full legal harmony in areas concerning sexual and reproductive freedoms, and on the other hand supporting unequal social welfare spending in the Caribbean territories. Parliamentary and press sources available online form the bulk of source material for this chapter, enabling me to connect conversations spanning the Dutch parliament, insular governments, and LGBT civil rights groups on both sides of the Atlantic.

Debates over LGBTQ rights after 2010 are in many ways emblematic of the larger history of the Kingdom: as new bonds of cooperation are forged in this multi-national Kingdom,
sexual politics have time and again highlighted both the promises and the challenges of creating equitable bonds of citizenship, and have proved to be one powerful venue in which to negotiate belonging, sovereignty, and the memory of the colonial past. As the title of this dissertation suggests, “closer ties” at once speaks to the political realities of the Dutch-Antillean connection and evokes the often messy and intimate human relations that the political bears upon.

**Contribution of Findings**

Over the past fifteen years, activists and scholars—many of them Antillean and Surinamese Dutch—have attempted to direct public attention in the Netherlands to that country’s colonial and slavery past. Growing public attention to the atrocities of the colonial past, however, has divided the Dutch public over whether or not the state remains accountable for the crimes of past centuries. Politicians of the ascendant right have channeled Dutch frustration over the demands for apologies, reparations and concessions in the Antilles and Suriname into popular party platforms—insisting, despite Antilleans’ full Dutch citizenship, on the restriction of movement within the Kingdom, the imposition of integration measures for Antillean immigrants and, most controversially, the total severance of ties with their Caribbean compatriots.33 My dissertation aims to contradict these revisionist histories of an increasingly marginal Dutch entanglement in the Antilles by illustrating instead the growth in substance and meaning of transatlantic ties throughout the postcolonial period.34

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33 The right populist and anti-immigrant Party for Freedom (*Partij voor de Vrijheid, PVV*) supports the “independence” of the Netherlands and the dissolution of the Kingdom. More centrist parties such as the People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy (*Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie, VVD*) supported the controversial “Bosman law” when it was proposed in 2010, which aimed to restrict immigration of Antillean-born Dutch citizens to the mainland Netherlands.

34 Lammert de Jong notes that many Dutch, especially the generation coming into political consciousness within the past decade, do not understand the historic responsibility of the Dutch to the Antilles. De Jong, “The Implosion of the Netherlands Antilles,” in eds. Clegg and Pantojas-García, *Governance in the Non-Independent Caribbean*, 33.
That the post-World War II period has witnessed, above all, the intensification of bonds between the Dutch and the Caribbean provides an alternative way of imagining and living the trajectory of postcolonial history. In view not least of the evident fragility of many postcolonial nationalisms, scholars have sought to recover different ways of understanding the diverse forms of colonial overcoming. David Scott, among others, has encouraged scholars to dispense with triumphalist narratives of revolutionary anti-colonialism, suggesting that historians must instead incite new questions of the past that inspire the, as he puts it, “possibility of thinking critically through our postcolonial political present.”

The Dutch Caribbean offers a compelling historical example. In the absence of a revolutionary nationalist tradition, anti-colonial discourses in the Antilles have sought to strike a balance—often quite precarious—between insisting on greater Dutch responsibility to its imperial remnants and broadened autonomy. Though this negotiation has not been without its complications, the complexities of the Antillean past correct widely held assumptions about the dénouement of empire and its ostensible conclusion.

In ways both predictable and obvious, the colonial past looms large in the non-sovereign world, with countless places often only ambiguously integrated into former metropolitan states. Yet my interest is not to claim that empire lives on at the margins of the former official Dutch imperium. Rather, it is to ask how our understandings of empire and its aftermath shift when we view decolonization not as a parting of ways, but a strengthening of ties.

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Chapter One

Responsibility and Reform: Domestic Anxieties in the Age of Decolonization, 1940s-1950s

In 1943, mere months after Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands promised to democratize the Dutch empire, the Estates of Curaçao\(^1\) embarked on an ambitious plan of moral reform. “Abnormal circumstances,” the Estates reasoned, “loosen the brakes of morality…and undoubtedly expand certain forms of evil, thereby threatening the community to a much greater extent.”\(^2\) Circumstances were, indeed, “abnormal” on Curaçao in the 1940s. The Nazi occupation of the metropolitan Netherlands sent the Dutch Queen and government in exile to London, affording colonial officers and newly-empowered elites more governing autonomy than ever before. Meanwhile, the island’s oil refining industry gained profound strategic importance in the struggle to liberate Europe from fascism. With increased wartime demand for oil in the 1940s, Curaçao’s Royal Dutch Shell-owned Isla refinery became the largest refiner of crude oil in the world, drawing thousands of migrant laborers and US and British marines to the island’s bustling port to staff and protect its most vital industry. Demands for governing autonomy and aspirations to reform the bonds of empire emerged alongside economic and demographic expansion on the Antillean islands. The combined momentum of World War II and global

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\(^1\) In 1936, the Estates of Curaçao replaced the Colonial Council. This occurred simultaneously with an extension of the franchise. Property-owning men above the age of 21—roughly 5-6% of the total population—were then eligible to elect ten of the fifteen members of the Estates. This slight democratization of colonial governance brought elite “children of the land” (“landskinderen”) into power, the majority of them descendants of European Dutch. The Governor of Curaçao, appointed by the Dutch monarch, continued to hold sway in the Estates, choosing the remaining five of its members. The Governor retained the power to suggest legislation to the Estates.

\(^2\) Universitaire Bibliotheken Leiden (UBL), Koninklijk Instituut Tropen (KIT) Collection, Staten van Curacao, Zittingsjaar 1942-1943-12: Landsverordening tot wijziging en aanvulling van de Verordening van den 9den Juni 1921, houdende bepalingen ter bestrijding van besmettelijke ziekten (P.B. 1921 no. 66) zooals deze is gewijzigd en aangevuld bij de Verordening van den 7den November 1931 P.B. 1931 No. 76. Memorie van Toelichting No. 3.
decolonization swept the small Antillean islands, once derided as the “poor stepdaughters of Holland,” back into the spotlight of world history.

As the actions of the Estates of Curaçao suggest, however, the urgency of the moment called forth unparalleled attention to issues of public morality. For major power brokers on Curaçao—including the late-colonial government, the oil industry, and the Catholic Church—the project to turn Curaçaoan subjects into disciplined and productive citizens would commence first and most importantly in the realm of the household. As this chapter explores, development initiatives and modernization schemes repeatedly targeted the intimate behaviors and desires of the island’s majority Afro-Curaçaoan population. Governing officials, management at the Isla refinery, and modernizing leaders in the Catholic Church each viewed the reform of Afro-Curacaoan household organization, child rearing practices, and sexual norms as both the guarantor and measure of decolonization’s success.

Why did concern with sexual morality emerge so acutely at empire’s end? Over the last three decades, scholars of colonialism have insisted that the regulation of sexuality served as a key site for exercising colonial control. If empire was so saturated by anxieties about sexuality, and if regulating sexuality was so critical to its maintenance, then the reformulation of imperial relationships by the mid-twentieth century would also necessarily turn up questions of its most potent ideological premise: the subjugation or enslavement of subject populations based in part

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on their alleged sexual profligacy. The system of racial hereditary slavery that prevailed in Curaçao and the broader Dutch Caribbean until abolition in 1863 hinged in more specific ways on the strict and violent control of black men and women’s sexuality in order to reproduce an enslaved population. What is more, as scholars of both colonialism and slavery have aptly shown, racial hierarchies did not function apart from gendered and sexualized stereotypes. It was precisely through the language of sexual danger and gendered deviance that race became imbued with devastating social significance. Race and sexuality were not to be uncoupled with the advent of abolition, however. As scholars of postemancipation societies have shown, abolition brought forth renewed concerns with the sexual morality of formerly enslaved people, and elites throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century looked to the non-white embrace of Euro-American “respectability” to evidence abolition’s success or, conversely, its failure. Similar concerns, I argue, surfaced anew at empire’s end. In this way, then, the history of Curaçao in the age of decolonization is not only the story of a former colony in transition. It is also a story about the lengthy, tangled afterlife of race after slavery.


Reading across the literature on empire and slavery, this chapter argues that the end of empire in the Dutch Caribbean reanimated racist assumptions that underpinned justifications for slavery on Curaçao. With the impending demands of democratization and industrialization, elites in the state, church and oil industry now sought to address the alleged sexual permissiveness of Afro-Curaçaoans with unprecedented reformist zeal. As M. Jacqui Alexander has argued of 1940s Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas, the conservative nationalisms that emerged across former Caribbean colonies strategically rebutted the very stereotypes that underpinned the unfreedom of black men and women. Indeed, on Curaçao, political elites similarly rallied around the promotion of “traditional” European family values in the transition to autonomy, pointing to their “moral” accomplishments as evidence of their ability to govern themselves. Yet, as this chapter argues, the late colonial regime was not the only actor concerned with intervening in the intimate lives of Afro-Curaçaoans. As such, this chapter broadens the scholarly view of the late colonial period by showing how other forces, including in particular the Royal Dutch Shell Company and the Catholic Church, also redoubled their efforts to promote the Western nuclear family among Curaçao’s subjects. In this time of crisis and opportunity, elites on Curaçao attempted to make “modern” precisely the space in which this colony, like so many other former slave societies in the Caribbean, had been constructed as “backward.”

Examining this initiative from three perspectives, this chapter considers moral reform and social welfare programs undertaken by the late colonial government, the Royal Dutch Shell Company, and the Catholic Church from the onset of World War II until the transition to autonomy by 1954. First, I explore the colonial state’s preoccupation with reforming conjugal

8 Alexander, "Not Just (Any)body Can Be a Citizen."
norms among Curaçao’s population. Immediately following the announcement of imperial reform in 1942, officers of the late colonial regime and a cadre of local leaders enacted a range of laws and initiatives designed to increase parental responsibility, including encouraging marital monogamy and incentivizing the recognition of children born out of wedlock, and decreasing the prevalence of divorce. Secondly, I analyze how the Royal Dutch Shell Company invoked similar racialized discourses around familial “responsibility” as the oil refining industry employed increasing numbers of Afro-Curaçaoan men in the 1940s. In their effort to harness and discipline local labor, Shell offered significant incentives for workers to marry—from free medical care to subsidized housing—which corresponded with a significant increase in marital rates on the island. Third and finally, I consider debates within the Catholic Church on Curaçao in the 1950s. In this time, a new generation of Catholic priests arrived on the island and pointed to the alleged profligacy of Afro-Curaçaoans as evidence of a lackadaisical and superficial religious climate on Curaçao. Significantly, this newer generation of Christian leadership insisted that broadening access to sexual education and empowering women would help to resolve what these actors identified as a decidedly masculine problem of marital infidelity and sexual irresponsibility. Taken together, this preoccupations with the conjugal and sexual norms of Afro-Curaçaoans undergirded schemes to transform the political, economic and social life of the island in the era of decolonization.

The Dangers of Divorce: Marriage Reform and the Late-Colonial Government

As the Dutch government sat in exile in London, governing elites on Curaçao rushed to prove their legitimacy and preparedness to govern with greater autonomy. For the Estates of Curaçao, the task of transitioning the island to a democratic post-colony commenced with the
initiation of wide-ranging moral reforms designed to address perceived threats to public morality that percolated during the war years. Venereal disease, the menacing presence of thousands of itinerant single men on the island, and the scrambling of traditional gender roles with the potential conscription of women into the wartime workforce all emerged as points of debate and reform.\(^9\) According to elites, each of these issues threatened not only public health and virtue, they also destabilized marriage and resulted in an ever-increasing number of divorces. The unifying concern with reforming the conjugal norms of the Curaçaoan population and incentivizing marriage throughout the next decade thus justified unique and unprecedented interventions into the romantic lives of colonial subjects.

Months after US and British forces arrived on Curaçao in 1942, the leading local paper on Curaçao, *Amigoe di Curaçao*, anxiously reported, “The increase in the number of divorces manifests in history in periods of growth and is an infallible harbinger of decadence and collapse. If we consider the Territory of Curaçao, then it will be apparent that decadence is also ravaging there. Not only does the number of officially dissolved marriages steadily increase, but it is all the more startling when one compares the number of marriages with the number of divorces.”\(^10\)

The anxieties reflected here—the rising prevalence of divorce and the decreasing appearance of marriage—inflected the early course of action undertaken by the Estates and emerged as a defining program of reform aimed to distinguish Curaçao as a bastion of morality in contrast to the allegedly lax Netherlands. These initiatives by the late-colonial government have not merited attention by historians. Rather, political historians of the 1940s in the Dutch Antilles have

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\(^9\) These issues are debated in UBL, KIT, Zittingsjaar 1943-44 Staten van Curaçao - Landsverordening houdende bepalingen om Ontaarding der Goede zeden der jeugd te gaan. Memorie van Antwoord No. 5; Staten van Curacao, Zittingsjaar 1942-1943-12: Landsverordening tot wijziging en aanvulling van de Verordening van den 9den Juni 1921, houdende bepalingen ter bestrijding van besmettelijke ziekten (P.B. 1921 no. 66) zooals deze is gewijsigd en aangevld bij de Verordening van den 7den November 1931 P.B. 1931 No. 76. Memorie van Toelichting No. 3.

focused overwhelmingly on the exchanges between the Netherlands and the Antillean islands during the so-called Round Table Discussions that eventually resulted in the creation of a commonwealth Kingdom and autonomous governance in the Netherlands Antilles.\textsuperscript{11} Yet, my contention in this section is that these moral reform initiatives are symptomatic of precisely this process. Modernizing the state was not simply a process of transferring duties of governance. Indeed, when one explores the issues undertaken by the Estates during the war years, one sees frequent and interconnected allusions to public morality and political and social modernization. The Estates attempt to tackle the perceived problem of divorce and the waning importance of marriage was one such issue that emerged in connection with the changes to Curaçaoan politics and industry during World War II.

At the first meeting of the Estates in April 1944, chairman John Sprockel addressed his colleagues with a message of hope and foreboding. “The population must realize that their cooperation is absolutely necessary in ensuring the success of hygienic measures and in obtaining satisfactory living conditions …Laws that do not become habits seldom develop deep roots.” Sprockel continued:

Both nature and the law demand that parents care for their children, but the impact of habits is evidenced in the thorny question of illegitimate children. To name just one island, on Curaçao in 1943 664 illegitimate children were born, about one fourth of the total…Of course, this reveals an absence of a feeling of responsibility (\textit{verantwoordelijkheidsgevoel}), but also slackness (\textit{laksheid}) and ignorance of the advantages attached to marriage…[such as] child financial support (\textit{alimentatie}) and inheritance. I am considering measures…and call on all possible cooperation to put an end to this situation, which may be historically explainable but today unnecessarily tarnishes our community and is highly socially undesirable.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{11} The seminal works on decolonization policy in the Dutch Caribbean are Inge Klinkers, \textit{De Weg Naar Het Statuut:} and Oostindie and Klinkers, \textit{Knellende Koninkrijksbanden}.

\textsuperscript{12} UBL, KIT Collection, Minutes of the \textit{Staten van Curaçao}, 4 April 1944, p. 3.
How should this “situation” be remedied? What were its causes and who was primarily responsible for perpetuating non-marital and reproductive relationships? Sprockel likely felt little urgency to clarify such questions, as his use of the terms “slackness” and “absence of responsibility” would have already implied enough to his audience. As scholars of race have noted, such language is profoundly racialized, conjuring stereotypes of immaturity, irresponsibility and sexual danger that permeated justifications for slavery and that continued to hold critical sway after its end.13 But this is not the historical explanation that Sprockel referred to in his address to the Estates in 1944. Rather, the chairman likely had in mind the proscription on Curaçao that, until abolition in 1863, forbade enslaved men and women from marrying. In Sprockel’s logic, where once slavery was to blame for the absence of Western-style nuclear families among black households on Curaçao, now it was these families themselves who were responsible for their own failure. In its new democratizing and modernizing form, the colonial state would now help these subjects-turned-citizens to conform to Western ideals of respectability that were deemed vital to the transition to autonomy.

Although discourse on sexual irresponsibility has long served as a proxy discussion for race outside of postemancipation Curaçao, and indeed continues to structure contemporary discussions on race in many societies,14 what merits attention here is the urgency with which the alleged “abnormalities” of the Antillean household were pursued at the moment of decolonization and in a period of dramatic economic growth on the island. As another member of the Estates reasoned in the summer of 1943, “What do we get if year after year we direct

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13 See especially Scully, Liberating the Family?, and De Barros, Reproducing the British Caribbean.  
money from the budget to the building of dams and…this or that building and yet we do not look at the moral situation of Curaçao? These are also priorities that we must protect. We must work together…to lift up the morality of Curaçao.”\textsuperscript{15}

One of the ways that some members of the Estates sought to address these charges to raise the moral climate on the island was tied explicitly to building and development. In their analyses of the declining relevance of marriage, members of the Estates pleaded for a more interventionist development program on Curaçao, particularly in the realm of the island’s housing stock. As one member of the Estates opined, “The housing question is, in the first place, an ethical question. The young people must be able to marry…but there are no homes available and the people are all thrown together in one house, and crazy things also come from this.”\textsuperscript{16}

The idea that couples refrained from getting married owing to lack of housing options emerged repeatedly in the meetings of the Estates. Also emphasized were the unhygienic and poor moral conditions stemming from overcrowded dwellings. In 1942, one member of the Estates argued, “We ask for subsidized housing (volkswoningen) to provide our less prosperous people with better provisions…There was and is an extreme shortage of subsidized housing, which tests hygienic and moral demands.”\textsuperscript{17} The next year, another member of the Estates claimed that young married couples who did not secure housing ended up divorcing after a mere five months, while others were obliged to forego marriage entirely due to lack of access to adequate housing.\textsuperscript{18}

These concerns were so pervasively shared that by the end of the 1943 budget year, the Estates annual report included a lengthy discussion on the moral dimensions of the housing shortage. Their explanations highlight how centrally anxieties about marriage—or, rather, its absence—

\textsuperscript{15} UBL, KIT Collection, Minutes of the Staten van Curaçao, 17 August 1944, p. 38.
\textsuperscript{16} UBL, KIT Collection, Minutes of the Staten van Curaçao, 1 June 1951, p. 48-49.
\textsuperscript{17} UBL, KIT Collection, Minutes of the Staten van Curaçao, 24 June 1942, p. 27.
\textsuperscript{18} UBL, KIT Collection, Minutes of the Staten van Curaçao, 6 April 1943, p. 63.
factored into development schemes on Curaçao. Whether strategic or sincere, it nevertheless shows the purchase of marriage discourse in advancing seemingly unrelated programs of social housing.

In their pursuit of intensified development, elites of Curaçao’s late colonial government followed a trajectory quite similar to their better-known counterparts in Britain and France. As Frederick Cooper has argued, the postwar effort to hold together French and British empires witnessed colonialism at its most reformist. In the Dutch Caribbean, too, the 1940s brought unparalleled efforts to expand industry and employ local labor on arguably more humane terms. At least in parts of the British and French empire, however, expanding development would also prove to be imperialism’s undoing as metropolitan populations proved unwilling to satisfy the cost of building infrastructure in the colonies. On Curaçao, development and its costs, however unevenly and sporadically pursued, did not break the bonds between the metropolitan Netherlands and Curaçao. To the contrary, Curaçao and its five island partners elected to remain in Dutch orbit in the 1940s, insisting instead on strengthening the bonds of cooperation between Europe and the Caribbean.

Bringing the Curaçaoan family into the fold of modern society also became a concern of the law. In their effort to incentivize marriage and highlight Curaçao’s moral and cultural affinities with the modern world, the Estates broke with the traditional pattern of harmonizing Antillean and Dutch law to found a separate and far stricter divorce code on the island. The debate commenced in 1943 and hinged on the question of providing evidence of marital infidelity, one of the few reasons why a couple might be granted a divorce. Because Antillean law forbade divorce on grounds of irreconcilable differences, unhappy couples often strategically

20 This was especially true in the oil refining industry. See van Soest, *Olie als Water*, 444-446.
claimed that a partner had cheated in order to be granted a divorce.21 “This state of affairs,” the Estates lamented, “has corrupted the essence of divorce to a condition that must be regarded as unsustainable.”22 This state of affairs was unsustainable not least because the circumstances of the war would only further diminish the climate of morality on the island at a time when it urgently sought to prove its preparedness for autonomy. As one member of the Estates argued, “We are on a slippery slope…Especially in this time of war, when savagery of manners and evil have adopted new forms, it is my opinion that government intervention is necessary.”

Intervention, however, would require that Members of the Estates break with legal tradition and instead forge wholly new colonial divorce laws separate from those of the metropolitan Netherlands. The statesman continued, “I am therefore surprised by the Dutch legal scholars who find this legal prohibition to be positively immoral.”23

Although some members of the Estates spoke out in opposition to the law and claimed that the Antillean divorce law was already sufficiently strict,24 no member of the Estates challenged the notion that the government should intervene to uphold “Christian principles” of marriage in Curaçaoan society. When the Estates voted on the revised divorce law in 1944, only one member of the Estates—the populist Aruban leader Henny Eman—abstained from voting, while all who questioned aspects of the law ultimately voted to enact it despite their misgivings.25 The day after the law was approved on 18 August 1944, Amigoe di Curaçao celebrated the accomplishment: “Here it appears that Curaçao is once again paving the path for

23 UBL, KIT Collection, Minutes of the Staten van Curaçao, 17 August 1944, p. 38-39.
24 The then-contemporary divorce code prohibited cheating partners to marry those with whom they committed adultery, and prevented couples from divorcing within the first two years of marriage.
25 “Geen Verstekvonnis meer op Curaçao,” Amigoe di Curaçao, 18 August 1944.
good morals.” With a great deal of public interest, the article continued, it would remain to be seen whether the new law would “diminish the evil of divorce” but nonetheless trusted that “London,” or the Dutch government in exile, “will value this important work.”

Striking in the discussion around divorce law in the 1940s is the extent to which the reformulated Antillean divorce code became a testing ground for distinguishing Curaçao from its metropolitan overseer and for reassuring metropolitan leaders of Curaçao’s preparedness to govern its subjects autonomously. Without any prompting from the government in exile, the colonial Governor on Curaçao redoubled his efforts to incentivize marriage and the recognition of children born out of wedlock. Governor Kasteel opened the meeting of the Estates of Curaçao on 4 April 1944 with his ambitious plan to reverse Curaçao’s rising rate of illegitimate births, which accounted the previous year for roughly 30% of live births. Just before the passage of the divorce law in August 1944, the Governor collaborated with an official from the Civil Registry on Curaçao to promote marriage among cohabitating couples with children, inviting them to wed easily before the law and claim parental responsibility over their children. After outreach in the community, a total of 177 children were legally recognized by a parent during the first two weeks of August—the great majority of them by their mother. Similarly, couples living in so-called “concubinage”—living together but unwed—were encouraged to marry in order to “raise the moral level of the population and…cultivate the feeling of responsibility.”

The Estates’ tripartite plan—to prevent divorce, encourage marriage, and reduce the number of illegitimate births—intersected with justifications for building new and affordable

26 “Staten Overzicht,” Amigoe di Curaçao, 18 August 1944.
28 UBL, KIT Collection, Minutes of the Staten van Curaçao, 4 April 1944, p. 3.
29 “Erkenning van Natuurlijke Kinderen,” Amigoe di Curaçao, 17 August 1944.
housing projects on Curaçao and with the government’s more abstract ambition to modernize the social and sexual mores of Curaçaoan society on the eve of autonomy. Taking issues of morality, marriage and divorce into their own hands, the Estates independently spearheaded a program of moral reform as a way to both appease and outshine the metropolitan Netherlands. The fact that it was precisely on the terrain of the household that a defiant and enterprising colonial government began its program of reform is significant. It suggests that late-colonial officers sought to address the justifications for the island’s subjugation at the source. The alleged abnormalities of the Antillean household would no longer explain the island’s unfreedom or its exclusion from the modern world.

**Love in the Time of Oil**

The colonial government was not the only party interested in encouraging “responsibility” among the population, or, more specifically, poor and working-class Afro-Curaçaoans. The Royal Dutch Shell Company likewise embarked on an ambitious program of social reform to encourage discipline among local workers. Shell did this not least by incentivizing marriage through a range of economic benefits for workers and their families. Combining economic power with social reach, Shell’s social programs ultimately did correspond to an increase in marital rates and a decrease in illegitimate births on the island. In this way, then, it was not simply the intervention of the state but also the power of capital that would serve to shape matters of love, intimacy and domesticity on Curaçao in the 1940s-1950s.

In the pages of its monthly workers publication, *De Passaat* (The Trade Wind), various commentators extolled the virtues of marriage and celebrated masculine duty to wives, children and work. One 1947 issue featuring a cover story on “Responsibility” opined, “In life, people
must carry responsibility in all kinds of ways. There is no person on earth that does not have some form of responsibility. Sensible parents teach their children this at a young age…A feeling of responsibility means the fulfilling of one’s duty. The greater the sense of responsibility is, the higher one climbs the social ladder.”

As the island’s largest employer, Shell was conscious of its outsized role on Curaçao. When the refinery opened on Curaçao in 1919, Shell abstained from hiring local Afro-Curaçaoan men, believing their command of the Dutch language, familiarity with the demands of the industrialized work force, and work ethic all to be lacking. Instead, Shell routinely employed thousands of contract laborers from Europe, the United States, and predominantly British Caribbean islands. When World War II erupted, however, demand for local labor increased and Shell began to experiment with providing requisite transportation between outlying towns to the refinery in Willemstad’s harbor. With near full male employment on Curaçao in the 1940s, Shell grew to its peak operating capacity and life changed precipitously for a predominantly rural Afro-Curaçaoan population.

The discourse of “responsibility” again attended to the integration of Afro-Curaçaoans into Shell’s workforce. In quotidian but no less significant ways, De Passaat celebrated all worker marriages and legitimate births in its monthly issues. Short blurbs and images celebrated the marriages of male as well as female workers, often congratulating women employed by Shell on their ability to retire from the workforce once married. This exaltation of domesticity, of course, clashed with the longstanding reality of the company, which relied in large measure on the labor of single men traveling from foreign countries without their wives or children. It was in no small part because of this contingent of single male laborers that the colonial government,

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31 Soest, Olie als Water, 432.
32 Women’s roles at Shell rarely factor into the literature, but De Passaat portrays women in secretarial roles and shows how the wives of male Company workers were involved in the social life of the Company.
in concert with the Catholic Church, opened up a state-sanctioned brothel near the island’s main airport in 1949. A committee established to study the problem of prostitution in 1942 recommended that laborers and sailors orbiting the island’s oil industry must be given access to light-skinned foreign women so that the local women would not be harassed. While Curacao’s white women would be spared unwanted attention from sailors, marines and Shell laborers, domestic sex workers—the vast majority of whom were women of color, owing to their longstanding exclusion from the formal labor market and social marginalization writ large—were denied entry into the brothel, which was in turn rationalized as both a defense of local womanhood and a catering to demand for light-skinned sex workers from the Dominican Republic and Colombia. According to the committee charged with studying prostitution, regulating sex work would be economically advantageous for Shell and the government, allowing them to avoid the costs associated with the migration of families: “Next to the capital investment for housing, this carries the consequence of needing to pay higher wages, including an increase in the cost of travel for families, and, in the event of economic recession, the problem of foreign labor will grow even larger than if guest workers come without their families, because they can easily be sent back.”

Domestic labor, however, required separate provisions. As Shell began to rely increasingly on Afro-Curacao laborers in the 1940s, separate schemes emerged to accommodate the formation of stable married households and the modernization of the island more broadly. De

34 Archivo Nashonal Aruba (ANA), Archief van het Bestuurcollege van het Eilandgebied Aruba (BCAR), 1951-1961, Commissie ter Bestrijding van Prostitutie en Geslachtziekten, 8 May 1942.
35 Ibid.
Passaat enthusiastically reported on the ways in which Shell was contributing to the social modernization of its island headquarters:

The oil industry exercises great influence on the social territory where she is established. Apart from the material advantages, she offers among other things the raising of income for the treasury, the increase in buildings, education, relaxation, sport, and hygiene. Her influence on social-economic terrain is of indescribably great importance. Also of undeniable value is the influence she exercises on her staff, making the latter more methodical and disciplined in their work.\[36\]

This was not empty rhetoric. In the absence of a robust welfare state, Shell did indeed do much to expand affordable housing for workers. But perhaps its most radical program came in the form of expansive social services for Shell employees and their legal wives and children. After some workers began agitating for higher wages to meet the rising cost of living, Shell formed an “Advice Committee” in lieu of allowing its workers to unionize.\[37\] In 1947, following several meetings of the Advice Committee, Shell extended free medical care to workers’ wives and children, agreed to expand appropriate housing for families, and in 1950 created widower pensions.\[38\] Shell linked their expansion of these social services to the emerging zeitgeist of modernization and development in the Caribbean, claiming:

The realization of the need for sound social welfare projects is resulting in several changes and introductions all over the world, and particularly in the West Indies. ...Every new introduction should form part of a predetermined pattern, not merely an isolated [sic] innovation. And bearing in mind the fact that our own area has got past the stage of a bachelor community and is fast assuming the form of the balanced community with peoples of both sexes and of all ages, social welfare now has to be expanded to include in its advantages all the sections in the community.\[39\]

\[37\] “Sociale Toestand op Curaçao: Hoe is het nu op Curaçao?” *Amigoe di Curaçao*, 5 March 1947.
Pointing to the rising incidence of marriage, this commentator used marital rates to measure the success of Shell’s social welfare initiatives. Much as in the late colonial government’s scheme to incentivize marriage, Shell also saw the imperative to expand social welfare and the urgency to reform conjugal norms among workers as inextricably linked. Unlike elite nationalist leaders on Jamaica, for example, who exclusively displaced blame for underdevelopment onto the sexual culture of working-class black Jamaicans in the 1930s-40s,\footnote{See Bourbonnais, “‘Dangerously Large.’” Bourbonnais demonstrates how elite and nationalist silence on structural causes of poverty opened space for Christian churches to summarily dismiss some nationalist’s support for birth control as a “false panacea” for the island’s poverty.} on Curaçao both the late-colonial government and the Royal Dutch Shell Company paired their attack on Afro-Curaçaoan conjugal norms with plans to address underlying structural issues such as lack of housing, education, and social services.

In the 1960s, Dutch sociologist Eva Abraham van der Mark began her research on the so-called “matrifocal” family allegedly prevalent among Afro-Curaçaoans. With generous funding from new scholarships and institutions designed to strengthen cultural and intellectual exchange between the Netherlands and the Caribbean, van der Mark investigated among other things the impact of Shell’s social welfare programs on marital rates.\footnote{Her book, *Yu’i Mama*, was funded by the *Nederlandse Stichting voor Wetenschappelijke Onderzoek voor de Tropen* (WOTRO). The Dutch government funded WOTRO and other similar initiatives beginning in the late 1940s in an effort to strengthen intellectual exchange between Europe and the Caribbean with an eye for developing the Dutch Antilles and Suriname. WOTRO’s early funded studies included investigations of family structures among Afro-Curaçaoans, including A.F. Marks’, *Male and Female and the Afro-Curaçaoan Household* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976). This research is in part the subject of chapter four of this dissertation.} Looking to marital statistics and rates of legitimate births on Curaçao, van der Mark argued that marriage rates increased and illegitimate births decreased during the years that Shell maintained these social welfare provisions between 1947-1960, and that within two years, rates of illegitimate births reached their pre-1947 levels.\footnote{Van der Mark contended that Shell did more than Church to break the conjugal patterns associated with slavery. Without economic empowerment, marriage proved too risky and costly for many, and as unemployment rose to over} Such evidence is compelling, as van der Mark herself argued, and
suggests that the power of capital did more than the power of state or church combined to
“reform” household organization among Afro-Curaçaoan workers. While many laborers and
their families undoubtedly benefited from access to housing and medical care, and certainly
mourned the dissolution of these programs after mechanization at the refinery in 1959 resulted in
mass layoffs and the scaling back of social services, my interest here is less in identifying
whether or not such measures were coercive, or if they were indeed effective in changing
romantic norms on Curaçao. Rather, my interest lies in documenting the way Shell, like the
colonial government, deployed a similar racialized rhetoric of respectability and responsibility
and linked the goal of its social welfare programs to the successful “reform” of the Afro-
Curaçaoan household in the 1940s-50s.

Catholicism and Conjugality

In contrast to Shell’s sudden concern with the moral lives of its Afro-Curaçaoan workers,
the Catholic Church on Curaçao had long endeavored to influence the intimate behaviors of its
Afro-Curaçaoan adherents. By the early 1950s, however, a new generation of European Dutch
priests on the island had begun to doubt the efficacy of past approaches and sought new methods
for addressing what elites perceived as unresolved and abiding issues of sexual irresponsibility.
For this reformist group, enduring immorality represented an indictment of the Catholic
Church’s role on Curaçao and evidence of its superficial penetration into the spiritual lives of its
followers. These reformers arrived on the island with a sense of historical urgency. As the
power of state and capital ascended in the postcolonial period, the Church would likewise need
to prove its claims to social relevance on the terrain of the household.

20% in 1960, so, too, did rates of illegitimacy. Illegitimate births were lowest in 1952 (23.9%) but rose steadily
after mass layoffs resulting from mechanization at Isla in 1960 (27.9%), 1967 (34.9%) and 1970 (33.4%). Figures
cited in Van der Mark, Yu’i Mama, 158.
With the arrival of Dominican missionaries on Curaçao in the nineteenth century, encouraging the stable formation of Western-style nuclear households emerged as the premiere task of the post-emancipation period. The efforts of Catholic missionaries helped to produce religious and racial hierarchies on Curaçao. Elites guarded Protestantism and Judaism as the preserve of white elites but in the nineteenth century permitted Catholic missionaries to convert and “civilize” the majority Afro-Curaçaoan population. In 1935, approximately 74% of Curaçao’s total population was cash-poor and Catholic.

As a major powerbroker on the island, Catholic leaders were involved in state-led efforts to reform sexual behavior in the 1940s when wartime demands raised concerns across church and state about the island’s moral climate. Perhaps most remarkably, established Catholic elites on Curaçao participated in efforts to create a system of regulated prostitution in the 1940s and served on the 1942 committee tasked with studying the prevalence of prostitution and possible solutions for eradicating public immorality and venereal disease. Two Catholic priests served on this 1942 committee and helped to articulate its ultimate recommendations, including inviting foreign prostitutes to work in government-sanctioned brothels and requiring compulsory medical check-ups for sex workers. Pointing to the “very large number of male people on this island,” the committee warned, “the cleanliness and chastity of many of our girls are in great danger of being lost.” In this way, then, turning to foreign prostitution would help to protect the virtue of local womanhood during wartime. As a result of this committee’s finding, Campo Alegre opened its doors in 1949. The presence and continued operation of Campo Alegre, however,

troubled a younger generation of Catholic priests on Curaçao by the 1950s. For these reform-minded priests, local patronage of Campo Alegre and stagnating marital rates evidenced an insufficient Catholic mission on Curaçao.

This critique of the Catholic Church on Curaçao by the turn of the decade coincided with broader changes in Curaçaoan society. The long-held Church monopoly over healthcare and schooling dissolved throughout the 1950s, owing to growing secularization and the rise of private and state-run services resulting from the growth of the oil industry.47 Subtle social controls intended to enforce right belief and behavior thus fell away over the following decades. Until 1951, illegitimate children were prohibited from being baptized during the day and were only allowed to arrive at the church for their baptism under cover of darkness.48 Only in 1963 were these children allowed to have godfathers serve as witnesses to their baptism. Other regulations discriminating against unwed parents and their children persisted into the 1960s. It was only in that decade that illegitimate children would be allowed to attend the same schools as their peers born within wedlock, and that single mothers were allowed to deliver their children in the same maternity ward as their married counterparts.49

These draconian forms of social control came under attack by younger priests who advocated for a new approach to reforming relations between Afro-Curaçaoan men and women in light of the perceived durability of immoral practices. New approaches to tackling sexual morality, they argued, would be at the heart of attempts to reform Catholicism writ large—a

48 Van der Mark, Yu’i Mama, 23.
practice of “theological renewal” already underway in the metropolitan Netherlands. The young Dominican priest Wim van der Marck best embodied this emerging spiritual trend on Curaçao, and his controversial 1959 study of the situation in the Antilles would mobilize both supporters and detractors on the island.

Although it is unclear what precisely motivated the Catholic Church to commission a study of the spiritual situation in the Antilles, it is likely that the Church, too, experienced the 1940s-50s as a time of anxiety and uncertainty. In 1958-59, van der Marck spent nine months studying the situation on Curaçao. He considered the organization of the Catholic Church and the religious lives of its followers on Curaçao not only through the lens of theology, but also anthropology. Trained in both fields, van der Marck made a series of observations about the “traditional” methods of Catholic instruction on the island and looked for social and historical explanations for the inadequate absorption of Catholic values in Curaçaoan society. While the overarching goal remained the same—that is, to encourage marital harmony—van der Marck shifted the debate on responsibility and conjugal norms in some surprising ways.

First, van der Marck did not simply attack Catholics for relinquishing familial responsibility. Rather, he exhorted the very leaders of the Catholic Church on Curaçao for their backwards attitudes on family matters. He claimed that priests and other religious figures on the island were excessively focused on the administering of the sacraments without being attentive to the substance and depth of adherent’s faith. The young priest indicted entrenched Catholic elites for their “very traditional” approaches that bordered on dogmatic lectures and proscriptions—a feature of Curaçaoan Catholicism, he argued, that did more to isolate rather than incorporate believers. Isolation, however, was not only for the Church’s believers. It

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influenced the mentality of Church leadership, too. “Isolation,” van der Marck opined, “is a point of enormous importance and it is difficult to overstate its influence….Theologically and scientifically, spiritually and practically, the Antilles are isolated.”51 As a newcomer to the island, van der Marck observed that “when one arrives on Curaçao one gets the impression that one has stepped back in time—a mentality prevails that existed many years ago in Europe.” Evidence of this backwardness could be found in the Church’s lackadaisical attitude toward the “‘remarkable’ conjugal and family situation” and in the Church’s superficial “grip on the male population.”52 Administering the sacraments, van der Marck argued, would not be enough to meaningfully bring Curaçaons into the spiritual life of the church. In painting Curaçao as an isolated backwater, van der Marck hoped above all to implement a project of theological modernization on the island—a project that would foster a culture of religious and scientific learning53 and that would transform the conjugal lives of parishioners.

In a series of exchanges with the Provincial Father in the Netherlands in 1959, van der Marck defended his views on the Church’s limited reach into the lives of Curaçaons and, again, pointed to conjugal and sexual norms as evidence of the Church’s failure. Thus, van der Marck shifted the terms of debate to place accountability for moral deviance on the shoulders of inadequate church instruction, rather than on the individual neglect of Afro-Curaçaons. Pointing again to the “dangerous superficiality” of Catholicism among many Afro-Curaçaoan men, van der Marck painted a bleak picture of moral attitudes on the island:

51 Erfgoed Centrum Kloosterleven (ECK), Nederlandse Provincie van de Order der Dominicanen, Report by W. van der Marck on the living situation in the Antilles, 21 July 1959, p. 1.
52 ECK, Nederlandse Provincie van de Order der Dominicanen, Report regarding the situation of the Dominicans in the Antilles, 23 September 1959, p. 1.
53 Van der Marck lamented the absence of libraries on the island and the lack of a written or artistic culture. See ECK, Provincie van de Order der Dominicanen, Report by W. van der Marck on the living situation in the Antilles, 21 July 1959, p. 1.
After school age, most boys and a large number of girls no longer go to the church unless it is on Christmas, Good Friday, or on the occasion of a funeral or when they serve as godmother or godfather. A large number of men and women marry in the church, but for the most part after a long period when they lived together (potentially with another or with others) and had children; especially for the men, marital fidelity is hardly mentionable. In broad segments of the population, sexual activity before marriage increases the social prestige of boys and men. While there is naturally no accurate figure, it appears that homosexuality appears in abnormally high measure, although one would not expect this given the presence of 'Campo Alegre' (with an average occupation of 110 women and an average visit of 250-300 men and boys per evening).

What could explain the continued prevalence of such immorality despite the longstanding presence of the Church on Curaçao? In addition to the misguided and dogmatic approach of Church leaders on the island, who were perhaps more concerned with fulfilling duties rather than transforming lives, van der Marck proffered another historical explanation. “The earlier situation, which was determined by a number of historical factors, including slavery and the behavior of the elite of society, has already changed favorably in many individual cases and these changes continue...in the direction of Western European and North American patterns.”

In this way, van der Marck conceded that slavery—which forcibly dissolved family ties and which regulated the intimate lives of enslaved people—exerted a profound social influence on the descendants of the enslaved. The practice of concubinage, or cohabitation without marriage, he attributed to historical precedents under colonialism, when wealthy white elites fathered children with women of color whom they did not marry, and only seldom recognized or legitimated their children. Van der Marck’s historical sensitivity, while diverging substantially

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54 Emphasis in original. ECK, Nederlandse Provincie van de Order der Dominicanen, Letter to Provincial Father from van der Marck, 30 June 1959, p. 2.
55 ECK, Nederlandse Provincie van de Order der Dominicanen, Report by van der Marck on living situation in the Antilles, 21 July 1959, p.8.
56 Interestingly, early literature on Curaçaoan society placed blame for patterns of paternal absence on white elites. Harry Hoetink argued that, given the pressure to marry endogamously and for utilitarian purposes, Protestant and Jewish male elites often took a permanent mistress from the “free coloreds,” whom they would house outside of the city. Children born of these unions were, in Hoetink’s estimation, better cared for by Jewish than Protestant fathers.
from the rhetoric of the late-colonial regime and Shell, nevertheless upheld the nuclear family and marital monogamy as the ideal endpoint. Despite signs of a transition toward the nuclear family, van der Marck cautioned that individual successes alone would not sustain a broad cultural shift. Rather, he argued, “the problem can only be addressed…by a strongly enforced social pattern.”

In order to impose this new “social pattern,” van der Marck implored priests on Curaçao to embrace new methods in dealing with parishioners. His recommendations were twofold. First, he emphasized that priests seek to instill “a personal bond with the person of Christ” as the foundation for dealing with matters related to sexuality. Second, van der Marck advocated “extensive care for the development of women and girls, who in the current situation scarcely know a function apart from bearing children, and, what is more: to be a physical-sexual partner for the man.” This would require better instruction on and preparation for marriage alongside a broader program of social empowerment so that women and girls “can take their place in society next to men.” Van der Marck cautiously added that these issues highlighted the urgency of offering instruction on family planning to the growing population of Curaçao. Such beliefs no doubt placed van der Marck among a progressive minority of Catholic priests.

Yet, when established Church leaders on Curaçao reviewed van der Marck’s report, it was not his apparent progressivism that most offended them. Rather, established Catholic priests on the island rebuked van der Marck’s naiveté, drawing attention to the Church’s repeated efforts

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57 ECK, Nederlandse Provincie van de Order der Dominicanen, Letter to Provincial Father from van der Marck, 21 July 1959, p. 9.

58 Ibid.

59 Although like-minded priests would arrive on Curaçao in the 1960s and take on an active role in promoting family planning campaigns, which is in part the subject of chapter three.
to address the “male problem, which makes many of us hopeless and melancholic.” One priest mocked, “If [van der Marck] knows novel methods for dealing with this problem, do not let him hesitate—we are waiting on him and still know no solution.” Elites, then, quickly reverted to a narrative of essentialized black sexuality characterized by male promiscuity and irresponsibility. Rather than waste their efforts on a lost cause, Church officials concluded, “We currently see no possibility for repairing contact with this group.”

Van der Marck’s nine-month visit to Curacao touched off a lengthy correspondence—much of it critical to the young priest—between established clerical elites on Curacao and their counterparts in the Netherlands. Van der Marck himself had not anticipated such critical attention to his report. It seemed, then, that the author’s focus on sexual backwardness as evidence of Catholic failure touched a nerve. Throughout the 1960s, similar tensions persisted between progressive and conservative factions within the Catholic Church on Curacao. The timing of the initial eruption of these tensions in the 1950s, however, suggests that the Church was itself conscious of its own fragility in an age of democratization and decolonization. They, too, looked to the realm of the household as evidence of the Church’s continued relevance. For van der Marck, the prevalence of non-marital sex demanded the Church make new kinds of interventions, portraying itself as more human and less dogmatic, and placing individuals and their sexual habits in a broader social context. For van der Marck’s detractors, it was precisely the fact that some individual’s behaviors could not be reformed that the Church should maintain a privileged role in society, guarding a social boundary between the civilized and sexually responsible and those deemed irreparably irresponsible. Despite their differing positions, both

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converged in their belief that the household would be the terrain on which the Church justified its continued role on a rapidly changing island.

**Conclusion**

The domestic anxieties that coursed throughout elite discussions in the 1940s-1950s attended a broader process of political change and social uncertainty. After over a decade of debate and deliberation, the proclamation of the Charter of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1954 enshrined a new constitutional relationship between the Netherlands and its Caribbean territories. The Netherlands Antilles shed its dependent status and became an equal member and partner country of the Kingdom. The Netherlands Antilles and Suriname would govern their internal affairs autonomously, while The Hague would continue to oversee citizenship, defense and diplomacy. This new relationship maintained imperial geographies while reforming the substance and meaning of trans-Atlantic ties. Central to this process of political and social renewal, as I have argued, was a shared preoccupation with the Afro-Curaçaoan household as both a guarantor and a hindrance to the process of decolonization.

The modernizing aspirations of elites in the late colonial regime, oil industry, and Catholic Church were both coercive and condescending toward Afro-Curaçaoans. Redeploying longstanding stereotypes of black sexual irresponsibility, elites in the 1940s-50s justified a redoubled civilizing mission precisely at the moment when the political relationships between the Netherlands and the Caribbean were to be drastically transformed. Indeed, elites viewed the domicile as the first site of decolonization. Without reform in the household, subsequent political and economic changes would falter, and the Antilles would remain isolated island nations unready for belonging in the modern world.
The zeitgeist of development and reform at empire’s twilight resonated not only in the Kingdom of the Netherlands. As Frederick Cooper has observed, British and French colonial administrators, too, enacted a last-ditch effort of imperial reform and modernization in the 1940s. Paradoxically, Cooper argued, “it is…only in the last phase of colonial rule that something like the project of a reformist imperialism was implemented with any degree of seriousness.” And it was likewise “colonialism at its most reformist” that was the first to collapse in the British and French imperial world. In this way, then, colonial elites on Curaçao belonged to a wider generation of imperial reformers. Yet, in significant ways, their actions diverged from more familiar colonial powers, not least because their interventions set off an enduring pattern of increased and intensified exchange between Europe and the Caribbean. Indeed, reformist colonialism did not collapse in the Antilles. Instead, it was this version of colonialism that survived and set the tone for postcolonial Kingdom relations: a history characterized not by the severance but the strengthening of ties.

However, it is not simply the divergent trajectory of decolonization that merits scholarly attention to the Kingdom. The centrality of sexual and conjugal norms to late-colonial development schemes is also a striking feature of the Kingdom’s democratic transition. Elites across the late-colonial government, oil industry and the Catholic Church all converged in their effort to modernize the Afro-Curaçaoan household as a precursor to political and social modernity. If it was in the realm of the household that the Caribbean was constructed as an unmodern space under slavery, then it was likewise in the realm of the household that elites in the 1940s-50s endeavored to prepare the way for political, economic and social modernity. In this time of rapid change and uncertainty, however, it was not only elites who voiced anxiety.

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about the moral state of the islands. As the following chapter explores, decolonization and industrialization touched off moral panic on the neighboring island of Aruba, where newly enfranchised Dutch citizens leveraged an emerging democratic culture to uphold racial hierarchies, male chastity and feminine virtue.
Chapter Two

Sexual Morality and Separatism: The 1951 Campo Alegre Protest and Insular Identity on Aruba

In an exceptional visit to Aruba in May 1951, a reporter from TIME magazine observed an epic struggle that had recently beset this “arid, rust-colored Caribbean islet” and “colonial outpost of the Netherlands.” The struggle erupted on May 30, 1951 when “Virtue, cheered on by 3,000 righteous housewives, grappled with Vice, symbolized by 134 resentful prostitutes.” This confrontation marked the climax in a series of protests against a proposed brothel near the Aruban port city of San Nicolas, galvanizing religious leaders, women’s organizations, and an unprecedented number of island residents in opposition against the so-called Campo Alegre, or the Happy Camp. The protest movement of 1951—measured in the strength of its numbers and its wide and consistent coverage in the Antillean press—tested fragile democratic institutions intended to transition Aruba from a Dutch “colonial outpost” into a modern democracy. At the same time, in both content and in form, the protest movement unfolded within the framework of Antillean decolonization. Specifically, the relationship between Aruba and Curaçao, its island neighbor and seat of the government of the Netherlands Antilles, became a subject of urgent concern for the protest movement— not least because it was on Curaçao that the region’s first state-sanctioned brothel appeared two years earlier. In the protest movement of 1951, concerns

1 This chapter was previously published as “‘This is the Soul of Aruba Speaking’: The 1951 Campo Alegre Protest and Insular Identity on Aruba,” New West Indian Guide 90 (2016): 195-224. I thank the two anonymous reviewers and the editors of the NWIG for their valuable feedback on this chapter.
2 “A Problem of Two Professions,” TIME, 18 June 1951, n.p. All articles located in Biblioteca Nacional di Aruba (hereafter BNA), Departamento Arubiana/Caribiana (hereafter DAC), anonymous scrapbook. Where possible, page numbers have been retrieved via Delpher, http://www.delpher.nl/.
3 At the time of the protest in 1951, the Netherlands Antilles included six islands constituting four administrative territories. The islands of Curaçao, Aruba, and Bonaire formed three separate island territories (eilandgebieden), while the islands of St. Maarten, St. Eustatius, and Saba formed one administrative territory.
over the arrival of a Curaçaoan-style Happy Camp thus became deeply entwined with the issue of national belonging on Aruba.

The extent of emotional energy invested in the protest movement raises the question of whether the longing for a “separate” Aruba had been channeled into a moral and social project rather than an expressly political one. By 1951, Aruban aspirations to separate from the Antillean constellation were thwarted by the enactment of decolonization measures that broadened democratic self-governance in the Netherlands Antilles but united the six Dutch Antillean islands under the seat of government in Willemstad, Curaçao. This outcome was a significant setback for hardline separatists like the Aruban People’s Party (Arubaanse Volkspartij, hereafter AVP), who sought independence not from the metropolitan Netherlands but from Curaçao. Yet, as the protests over the proposed Aruban Campo illustrate, deepening inter-island tensions soon appeared in new theaters of public dialogue, in turn shifting the debates out of the halls of government and into church pews and city streets. As this chapter demonstrates, the mass protest against Campo Alegre on Aruba was enabled by decolonization policies at the same time that it gave vent to ambivalent feelings of opportunity and anxiety evoked by these very measures.

In important ways, Aruba’s postcolonial history mirrors that of other former colonies. Across the former Dutch, British and French empires, some former colonies sought not only to reform bonds with former metropolitan states, but likewise with former dependencies. Yet, strengthening ties between former colonies often gave way to intensified inter-colonial rivalry.

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Federations comprised of former colonies such as the short-lived West Indies Federation, a conglomeration of British Caribbean islands, or further afield in former French West Africa, the Mali Federation, ultimately dissolved into territorially-defined national states. By the mid-twentieth century, popular forms of Aruban nationalism similarly called into question the lingering relationship to neighboring Curaçao. Unlike in other former colonial federations, however, Arubans rejected national sovereignty as a means for gaining autonomy from Curaçao and instead aspired to forge bilateral ties with the Netherlands. As such, this chapter seeks to illuminate how antagonism within and amongst former colonies could eclipse even the demand to reform bonds between metropole and colony.

Central to understanding these inter-island struggles are closely related debates on sexual morality, debates that dramatically came to a head in the Campo Alegre protest of 1951. As other scholars of sexuality and gender in the Caribbean have demonstrated, the postcolonial nationalisms of the twentieth century conscripted men and women differently according to their gender, race, and class. Similarly, I view the intense discussions around sexual politics on Aruba in the 1950s within a constellation of equally passionate debates on the island’s enduring

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5 On the West Indies Federation, see Mawby, Ordering Independence and Colin Palmer, Eric Williams and the Making of the Modern Caribbean (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009). On the Mali Federation, see Cooper, “Possibility and Constraint.”

relationship to Curaçao and the metropolitan Netherlands. As this chapter will demonstrate, protesters against Campo Alegre on Aruba embraced and redefined notions of a unique Aruban identity. In the process, participants in the Campo debate combined previously popularized ideas of the island’s allegedly distinct racial heritage with new mandates for restrained sexual morality, reframing the boundaries of belonging on Aruba along the axes of race and sexual morality.

This chapter’s dual focus on inter-island antagonism and the gendered and racialized logics of insular identity sheds light on the complexities of anticolonial nationalism and throws into sharp relief the ways in which ordinary citizens made sense of the dizzying changes of the decolonizing state.

This chapter thus highlights the protest movement’s complex interactions with and contributions to prevailing ideas about decolonization. After surveying initial attempts to regulate prostitution during World War II and its immediate aftermath, I then analyze protest ephemera, press sources, and official documents produced at the height of the Campo protest in the spring and summer of 1951. First, I examine the protest movement’s recurrent appeal to a distinctly Aruban identity and complementary assertions of moral and racial superiority to Curaçao. Second, I survey the ways in which the protest movement made strategic use of the emerging democratic channels of the postcolonial state, including, above all, the opportunities offered by the Kingdom’s multitiered structure. Finally, I examine how the protest movement presented itself to and mobilized its supporters around the threat Campo ostensibly posed to marital bliss and domestic harmony. These messages, and the protest movement’s attendant promise of moral integrity, resonated in a time of widespread change and uncertainty as the island’s political future hung in the balance and the economy—centered on the once powerful oil refining industry—entered a phase of decline. As such, the extraordinary success of the protest
movement was owed not to how the Campo question displaced attention from the island’s political and economic future. Rather, the protest movement evoked incredible emotional energy precisely for the ways in which the Campo debate dynamically intersected with aspirations for increased autonomy, and the uncertainty and optimism born of this important moment in Antillean history.

**Regulating Prostitution, 1942-1949**

World War II drew the largest Dutch Antillean islands into roles of world-historical importance. The presence of oil refining industries on Curaçao and Aruba helped to fuel the Allied war effort, and the wartime boom in production brought both economic and demographic expansion to the islands. As Gert Oostindie and Inge Klinkers have argued, these developments contributed to a sense of optimism and self-confidence among Caribbean elites, who, at the war’s end, pushed to reform ties with the metropolitan Netherlands. Yet, the very conditions of growth and expansion that galvanized some Antillean leaders to seek greater autonomy from the Netherlands by the war’s end also produced innumerable anxieties about the unmooring of traditional values and public morality. The growth of port industries in Willemstad in Curaçao and San Nicolas in Aruba drew thousands of largely single male contract laborers, sailors on cargo ships and oil tankers, and Dutch and U.S. marines to Antillean shores in the years during and immediately following the war. Officials connected this traffic – significant for the small islands of Curaçao and Aruba, whose populations totaled 105,000 and 55,000 in 1951

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7 Oostindie and Klinkers, *Decolonising the Caribbean: Dutch Policies in a Comparative Perspective* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2004), 68.
respectively – to the alarming rise in venereal disease and the alleged appearance of open and flourishing hedonism in the port environs.⁹

These developments troubled colonial and religious leadership alike. On both Curaçao and Aruba in the first half of the twentieth century, the Catholic Church occupied a central role in civic life. Although Protestantism, the religion of early Dutch colonists, remained the primary religion of governing elites into the twentieth century, Catholicism had long been the majority religion of residents on Curaçao and Aruba. With the arrival of missionaries from the Dominican order in the nineteenth century, key institutions such as education and health care came under the auspices of the Catholic Church and remained under Catholic control until the 1950s.¹⁰ When colonial policy-makers on Curaçao attempted to address the perceived sexual needs of the island’s population of single males, they solicited the opinion and involvement of the Catholic Church in finding a solution. As discussed in the previous chapter, in 1942, a five-man committee, including members of the colonial government and two Catholic priests, convened to study the island’s prostitution problem and advise colonial administrators based on its findings.¹¹ This committee called on the police and health departments of both Curaçao and Aruba to supervise prostitution and sequester commercial sex within tolerated zones and hotels.¹² Upholding a statute introduced by the Dutch governor in 1936, the committee also endorsed the continued licensing of foreign sex workers hailing largely from Colombia, Venezuela, and the

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¹² Kempadoo, _Sexing the Caribbean_, 92.
Dominican Republic. Together with other regulationist measures, this imperative aimed to protect the chastity of local womanhood and public virtue.

This loose system of regulation was ultimately introduced on both Curaçao and Aruba in 1944 as an amendment to the earlier regulation of contagious diseases. Within a year, however, local officials on Curaçao complained that the measures had done little to improve flagrant displays of public immorality and decrease the prevalence of venereal disease. New proposals issued in 1945 advocated for the centralization of prostitution in a single destination away from Willemstad’s commercial and residential centers. In 1949, these plans became a reality when the first Campo Alegre opened its doors on the site of a former military encampment near Curaçao’s Hato airport. Only foreign women were permitted to enter and work in this sprawling compound—to this day the largest open-air brothel in the world—after registering with the police and obtaining a certificate of good health from medical authorities. Although this more interventionist system promised to sanitize downtown Willemstad, Campo Alegre directly contravened Articles 259 and 260 of the Antillean criminal code. These statutes prohibited the facilitation of prostitution by a third party and banned brothels—a peculiar situation for colonial officials, as Mariëlle Kleijn and Marlou Schrover have argued, who subsequently assumed the

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15 Kempadoo, Sexing the Caribbean, 92.
role of pimp in a government-run brothel. Neither articles in the Antillean penal code nor their Dutch antecedents, however, outlawed prostitution or criminalized the prostitute.

On Aruba, meanwhile, the regulations of 1944 and contradictory injunctions in the Antillean criminal code had created a peculiar situation in San Nicolas, site of the prosperous U.S.-owned Lago Oil and Transport Company. Although authorities permitted foreign prostitutes to establish temporary residence in the hotels Hija del Dia and Hollywood, the ban on third-party facilitation and brothel-keeping prohibited sex workers from entertaining clients in hotel chambers. As a result, commercial sex had become a public spectacle. By 1950, authorities complained of the scandalous situation on the island’s eastern shores, where hired taxis shuttled public women and their customers from the center of the city to the outlying beaches of Smal and Juana Morto. Mounting concerns over public prostitution on Aruba and the recent opening of Curaçao’s Campo empowered some officials on Aruba to attempt to remove immoral acts from public view.

On June 4, 1949, José María Debrot, owner of the hotel Hija del Dia requested a permit to build a “hotel” intended exclusively for a “certain category of women.” Debrot’s proposed establishment would house sixty rooms and a restaurant serving residents and their guests. Unlike Debrot’s Hija del Dia, this new establishment—dubbed Campo Alegre by its supporters and eventual detractors—would openly facilitate paid sexual encounters on the complex’s

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17 Ibid.
19 ANA, BCAR 1951-1961, Bestrijding der Onzedelijkheid, invr. nr. 544, DS-606-6, minutes of the second meeting of the Committee to Study Prostitution, July 13, 1951. According to this report, hotel owners coordinated with travel agencies in Colombia and Venezuela and the Dutch consulate and KLM operator in Santo Domingo to provide short-term visas permitting foreign women to work on Aruba for periods of four to six weeks.
20 ANA, BCAR 1951-1961, Bestrijding der Onzedelijkheid, invr. nr. 544, DS-606-6, minutes of the second meeting of the Committee to Study Prostitution, 13 July 1951.
grounds. In his proposal to Aruban authorities, Debrot strategically emphasized his desire to “move the guests from the heart of San Nicolas beyond the city limit, contributing to the social welfare of the island.”

Ironically, it was Debrot’s intent to shield the Aruban public from immoral acts that triggered significant popular outcry. In March 1951, as Aruban officials and civil servants repeatedly failed to find a suitable location for Debrot’s Campo, a number of housewives in San Nicolas caught wind of the looming plans. Under the leadership of president Clarita Villaba and secretary Marianita Chong of the Roman Catholic Women’s League (R.K. Vrouwenbond) of San Nicolas, a self-styled protest committee began to draw attention to the troubling specter of a brothel planned just “a short distance from a residential area, very close by the houses of good Aruban families with many children and who deserve to provide those children with a good upbringing.” Throughout the spring and summer of 1951, religious women’s organizations allied with leaders of Christian churches on Aruba to mobilize thousands of island residents—the majority of them women—in protest against the island government and Campo Alegre. Their aim was not only to prevent a Campo Alegre from arriving on Aruba, but also to abolish prevailing systems of regulation. Such measures, they insisted, flouted Christian principles and both Antillean and Dutch law. Moreover, the presence of a brothel on Aruba, they asserted, ran contrary to the Aruban people’s principles and mores.

Curaçao’s “Worthless Example”

In their confrontations with Antillean authorities in the spring and summer of 1951, leaders of the protest movement sought to defend Aruban families and public morality from government-sanctioned sin. While other scholars have commented upon the religiosity of the protest movement, none have remarked upon how the movement’s professed Catholicism and restrained sexual morality became deeply imbricated within notions of a discrete insular identity. Protest leadership and various sympathizers identified Curaçao as the antithesis to Aruba’s emerging island identity—not least because it was on Curaçao that the region’s first Campo Alegre came to exist. In this way, the Campo debate on Aruba became a powerful means for repudiating Curaçao and, in the process, advancing notions of a distinctly Aruban identity.

The Aruban identity popularized by commentators within the Campo debate was marked not only by the island’s supposed moral superiority, but also by the alleged racial superiority of Arubans to Curaçaoans. As I will later discuss, nationalist politicians on Aruba insisted that the island’s unique ethnic heritage set it apart from other Antillean islands. These actors called on the island’s large mestizo population—the descendants of early European colonists and Amerindians from South America—as the “real” Arubans. Until the arrival of the oil refining industry in the early twentieth century, Aruba’s population remained relatively homogenous owing to the absence of plantation slavery and the island’s isolation. By contrast, on Curaçao the Dutch West India Company established the bustling port city of Willemstad as a center of the Atlantic slave trade in the seventeenth century. Over two centuries of reliance on the enslaved labor of people of African descent on Curaçao thus differed substantially from the historical trajectory of Aruba, where the number of enslaved never totaled higher than 600.

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25 Alofs, “Onderhorigheid en separatisme.”
twentieth century, Afro-Caribbeans formed the majority population group on Curaçao and a growing minority on Aruba, as thousands of primarily Afro-Caribbean laborers came to work in the oil refining industry. Although the image of Aruba as a mestizo society and of Curaçao as an Afro-Caribbean society is a simplistic one that belies the diversity of both islands by the mid-twentieth century, some politicians on Aruba nevertheless succeeded in popularizing this reductive understanding of Aruban belonging, and which, as I will later demonstrate, inflected the tenor of the protest against Campo Alegre.

For some among the protest movement, the mere fact of the movement’s existence separated Aruba from Curaçao. One Catholic priest on Aruba, whose fastidious collection of press clippings, pamphlets, posters, and correspondence forms an important source base for this study, reflected in the opening pages of his scrapbook: “What is incredible is that Aruban women … have continued to protest, because this does not fit within the history of the Antilles. While on Curaçao no one raised their voice in protest when a brothel was built with the approval of the administration … on Aruba the government has now been forced to search for another location for the second time.” Similarly, an article in the consistently sympathetic Catholic newspaper, Amigoe di Curaçao, observed:

Aruba lies somewhere on the earth off the coast of Venezuela, a small pile of rocks tossed from God’s creating hand. What can we do? ... Not much. We lie between lands that can trample us. Economically speaking, the question of our survival depends on Lago. We are practically dependent on others for everything. But it is a fact that this small, precious and eternally loved little island has its own mentality and character. We will not discuss Curaçao, which accepted a Campo

29 Sizeable communities of Javanese, Chinese, Europeans, Americans, Surinamese and other Caribbean and Latin American nationalities, and Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews resided on Curaçao and Aruba by the mid-twentieth century.
and foreign prostitutes without protest. Curaçao must figure that out on its own. Our ideas are different: we do not want a Campo.\footnote{\textquoteleft\textquoteleft Aruba’s vrouwen zeggen: Wij willen geen buitenlandse prostitue’s,	extquoteright\textquoteright Amigoe di Curação, 13 November 1951, p. 5.}

For this commentator, Aruba’s homegrown moral tradition was all the more remarkable precisely because of the island’s political and economic dependence. In view of Aruba’s reliance on foreign industry and its marginal role on the international stage, the island’s autonomous moral character emerged as its most distinctive and celebrated trait.

While these authors indicted the complicity of the Curaçaoan public in the Campo question, other opponents of the brothel explicitly placed blame for Aruba’s emerging troubles on Curaçao. The Antillean press became an important tool for bringing this message to the public, and in newspapers such as \textit{Amigoe di Curaçao}, numerous sympathizers railed against their island neighbor. The paper’s opinion pages commonly accused Curaçao’s leaders, who had flouted the law with impunity, for encouraging a haughty sense of disregard among Aruban officials. One author opined, “what is yet more unbelievable is that fact that the government of Aruba stood very strongly because it was supported by Curaçao, which has illegally had a Campo Alegre since 1949.”\footnote{BNA, DAC, anonymous scrapbook, unpublished text, n.d., p. 7.} Repeatedly, opponents of Campo Alegre questioned why Aruba must follow Curaçao “when it has offered such a worthless example.”\footnote{ANA, BCAR 1951-1961, Bestrijding der Onzedelijkheid, invr. nr. 347, DS-13474, correspondence to Lt. Governor, 12 March 1951.}

Curaçao loomed large in the protest movement’s rhetoric not only because the island housed the first Campo Alegre. The opening of the brothel in 1949 and its exclusive admittance of foreign sex workers from Latin America and the Hispanic Caribbean had evidently forced some local prostitutes to search for new clientele on Aruba.\footnote{ANA, BCAR, 1951-1961, Bestrijding der Onzedelijkheid, invr. nr. 544, DS-606-6, report following the departure of foreign prostitutes by Hendrik Cornelis Willemsen, Police Commissioner on Aruba, 12 May 1955.} Police reports from the late 1940s
and early 1950s cited the troubling increase in the number of Antillean prostitutes on Aruba, among whom the “Curaçaoan element predominated.” Indeed, forty-four of the island’s seventy-five registered prostitutes in 1951 originated from Curaçao. Meanwhile, police reported that until August 1951 there were “as good as no Aruban prostitutes” on Aruba. Thus, both officials and protesters perceived prostitution to be a largely “foreign” affair. What made the perceived threat of Curaçao so acute, however, was that Curaçao was a domestic Other in a position of political authority, bonded unevenly to Aruba through common citizenship, government, and the freedom of movement among the Dutch Antillean islands.

Commentators on all sides of the Campo debate routinely racialized Curaçaoan sex workers and claimed that the alleged undesirability of African-Curaçaoan prostitutes served as the primary justification for continued reliance on “white foreign women.” After the mass demonstrations in San Nicolas and the capital city of Oranjestad at the end of May, a subject to which I later return, Antillean authorities called for the formation of a committee to study prostitution on Aruba. The Antillean Attorney General and the committee’s chairman, J.J.A. Ellis, dismissed an unusual proposition to “import” exclusively Curaçaoan sex workers, claiming, “these Curaçaoan women would not satisfy the demand, and would therefore cause problems for the white women of Aruba. The local [Curaçaoan] prostitutes are black.”

35 Ibid.
36 Statistics on the number of prostitutes from Curaçao are cited in ANA, BCAR 1951-1961, Bestrijding der Onzedelijkheid, invr. nr. 544, DS-606-6, minutes of the second meeting of the Committee to Study Prostitution, 13 July 1951. The statement on the absence of Aruban prostitutes, which is most likely exaggerated, is found in ANA, BCAR 1951-1961, Bestrijding der Onzedelijkheid, invr. nr. 544, DS-606-6, report following the departure of foreign prostitutes by Hendrik Cornelis Willemsen, Police Commissioner on Aruba, 12 May 1955.
37 Scholars of Campo Alegre on Curaçao have argued that the recruitment of foreign prostitutes was intended primarily to protect local womanhood. For this argument, see Kempadoo, Sexing the Caribbean and Kleijn & Schrover, “The Dutch State as a Pimp.” By contrast, Aruban officials in 1951 largely assumed that Aruban women would not become prostitutes, and thus deemed necessary the continued licensing of foreign women in order to satisfy consumer demand for light-skinned women. Without male sexual access to light-skinned women, they argued, the island’s white women would be threatened.
38 ANA, BCAR 1951-1961, Bestrijding der Onzedelijkheid, invr. nr. 544, DS-606-6, minutes of the third meeting of the Committee to Study Prostitution, 26 July 1951.
thus made a cautious argument for the continued tolerance of foreign prostitutes by insisting that male sexual needs would threaten Aruba’s “white” females should clients be denied access to light-skinned sex workers.

Members of the protest movement, however, retorted that the sexual availability of white foreign women only made prostitution more appealing. In a letter to the editor of *Amigoe di Curaçao*, one author opined:

> One whispers that the foreign prostitutes must come as the indigenous are not sufficient because of their color. If there are no foreigners then the indigenous will be sufficient; they will only become busier. Men will take what they can even if they prefer the white foreigners. The traffic in foreign prostitutes makes a choice possible and the sin more attractive.\(^{39}\)

While sex workers were routinely racialized, a move that simultaneously served to “whiten” the Aruban population and equate this whiteness with chastity, the race of male clientele received little attention. Although many police and medical experts on Aruba contended that itinerant sailors and local men patronized prostitutes in equal numbers, the diversity among both of these groups renders the racial identification of clients—as in most instances—highly problematic.\(^{40}\)

What is salient in this exchange between governing officials and the protest movement, however, is the extent to which the protest movement succeeded in setting the terms of the debate. In a new atmosphere of representative politics, officials scrambled to defend their actions in the language of the protest movement itself, invoking the danger of prostitution to public morality and, more troublingly, racial purity.

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\(^{40}\) ANA, BCAR 1951-1961, Bestrijding der Onzedelijkheid, invr. nr. 544, DS-606-6, minutes of the second meeting of the Committee to Study Prostitution, 13 July 1951.
A minority voice on Aruba also deployed the threat of racial danger—this time as a way to indict the shortsightedness of the protest movement. Nearly one year after the mass demonstrations of May 1951, the San Nicolas circular *Chuchubi* ran the headline, “Curaçao vs. Aruba: *Barbuletas* [butterflies] vs. *Chinchurias* [whores].”  

The article denounced the protest movement and the island government’s subsequent decision in August 1951 to deport foreign prostitutes:

> Did you all anticipate as you marched through the streets in opposition to the “butterflies” (*barbuletas*) that this situation would cause a migration of prostitutes from Curaçao to Aruba? Did the administration consider … that a national migration would occur on Aruba? Did the island council consider when they protested against the “butterflies” that Curaçao would remain and give their whores permission to plant themselves on Aruba?  

Evidently it was not enough for certain critics of the protest movement to attack the implausibility or naïve idealism of a strictly abolitionist approach. Instead, these critics invoked racialized stereotypes of Curaçaon sex workers to argue that the abolition of foreign prostitution on Aruba had done more to threaten rather than protect the island.

These comments highlight a central and problematic feature of the Aruban identity popularized in the 1940s, and one that some leaders integrated into their pleas to separate from Curaçao: Aruba’s whitened racial identity in contrast to that of Curaçao. As Luc Alofs has argued, the formation of the AVP in 1942 did much to popularize notions of a unique ethnic Aruban identity and located the nation’s founding myth in the marriage between European

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41 *Chuchubi*, 30 July 1952. When authorities translated this article into Dutch, they qualified the term *chinchurias* with “dirty, filthy street hookers” (*vieze vuile straatmeiden*). ANA, BCAR 1951-1961, Bestrijding der Onzedelijkheid, invr. nr. 347, DS-13477-10.  
42 *Chuchubi*, 30 July 1952.
colonists and indigenous Amerindians. The popular maxim of the AVP, “Aruba for Arubans,” was as much anti-Curaçaoan and as it was anti-immigrant—a fearful expression of the island’s inferior status to Curaçao and a defensive backlash against the economic marginalization of local workers. By 1948, roughly 40 percent of Lago’s 8,262 employees hailed from the Anglophone Caribbean, and thus thousands of predominantly African–Caribbean laborers formed the backbone of the island’s most important industry. While the AVP’s nativist and xenophobic rhetoric rallied electoral majorities in the days of limited franchise, the broadening of the franchise and the organization of immigrants in associational clubs and political parties ultimately created increased competition for the AVP by 1951. Although the protest movement did not explicitly align itself with any political party, its equation of outsiders with moral degradation, and the concomitant defense of a unique Aruban character, in many ways reflect the AVP’s rhetorical strategies. Adding to and drawing upon prevailing discourses of Aruban separateness, the protest movement combined a restrained sexual morality with racially coded understandings of Aruban belonging.

This pattern of racialization on Aruba stands in contrast to emerging categories of racial difference on Curaçao in the 1950s. As Kamala Kempadoo has noted, Campo’s practice of inviting light-skinned Latin sex workers to Curaçao to the exclusion of local women of largely African descent has resulted in the production of “categories of womanhood … that distinguished between decent, domesticated local women and loose, exotic disruptive hypersexual Others.” The stereotyped image of the “SanDom” on Curaçao – typically understood as an unruly Latin sex worker – thus serves as a contrast to appropriate African-
Curaçaoan femininity. On Aruba in the early 1950s, however, and despite the number of foreign prostitutes from Latin America, commentators on the Campo question repeatedly connected African–Curaçaoan women with sexual chaos and moral disorder, a discourse that simultaneously served to “whiten” Aruban women. As Ann Stoler has argued, such racial, sexual and class discourses powerfully map “the moral parameters of the nation.”

Through discussion of prostitution and sexual politics, a range of actors became engaged in these efforts. Despite sometimes diverging opinion on the Campo question, these actors ultimately converged in their belief in Aruban separateness. While scholars have long noted the imbrication of gender, race, and class within understandings of nationalism, what bears stating in the Aruban example is that none among the chorus of voices expressed support for territorial sovereignty based on the familiar nation-state model. The articulation of a distinct and separate Aruban identity—saturated though it was by familiar markers of race, gender, and class—thus became an urgent project not in spite of its enduring connections to Curaçao, the broader Dutch Antilles, and the former colonial metropole, but precisely because of these revitalized multinational ties. It is to this subject that I now turn.

**Leveraging the Kingdom**

The protest movement owed its extraordinary efficacy in part to fortuitous timing. Sweeping decolonization policy enacted in 1951 democratized the bodies of Antillean governance and made space for the participation of citizens in civic life. While other scholars claim that participants of the Campo protest were motivated primarily by their religious

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idealism, the emphasis on the protest movement’s religious orientation overlooks the ways in which the movement and its supporters engaged with and navigated the politics of local, national, and Kingdom-wide governance. The protest movement availed itself in particular of constitutional changes that asserted the authority of Kingdom and national governments over local island administrations in the Antilles. Indeed, somewhat paradoxically, even as the protest movement advanced notions of a separate Aruban identity, they simultaneously leveraged Aruba’s non-sovereign political status to solicit intervention from authorities in Willemstad and The Hague.

As other scholars have recently pointed out, this kind of “layered sovereignty” emerged in the 1940s-50s as an attractive alternative to revolutionary anticolonial nationalism and territorial sovereignty premised on the national state. While recent scholarship is right to highlight the ingenuity of these multinational states, what has received comparatively less attention is the rather unglamorous and quotidian ways in which political elites and popular classes negotiated and made sense of the often opaque linkages between local, national, and Kingdom-wide governance. As such, these early years of reform were pregnant with both problems and possibilities, on the one hand producing innumerable frictions between various governing organs and personnel unsure of the scope of their authority, and on the other hand offering tremendous latitude for political improvisation while also making accessible multiple

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48 For this argument, see Alofs, “Publieke dames in een publiek debaat,” and Kleijn and Schrover, “The Dutch State as a Pimp.”
50 For useful examples of elite and popular negotiation of the complexities of multinational statehood, see Bonilla, Non-sovereign Futures and Wilder, Freedom Time.
channels for airing grievances and seeking redress. It was into this maelstrom of optimism and uncertainty that the debate over the Campo Alegre brothel emerged.

The protest movement’s strategy of leveraging the governing bodies of the Kingdom was enabled by the introduction of the Interim Regulation (Interimregeling) of February 1951 and the proclamation of the Island Regulations of the Netherlands Antilles (Eilandenregeling Nederlandse Antillen, hereafter ERNA) in March 1951. While earlier regulations in 1939 and 1948 introduced the basic principles of democratic self-governance to the Netherlands Antilles, including freedom of the press, the creation of a national parliament and, crucially, the introduction of universal franchise, the Interim Regulation and ERNA strengthened the democratic structures of the state and clarified the relationship between the national government and the Dutch crown, and between local island administrations and the national government.

Specifically, the Interim Regulation of 1951 strengthened the position of the Antillean Parliament, known as the Estates (Staten), which assumed primary responsibility for formulating the laws and regulations governing internal affairs in the Netherlands Antilles. The increased authority of the national parliament stripped the governor of the Netherlands Antilles – previously appointed by the Dutch crown—of many of the executive’s duties and made the position responsible to an Antillean council of ministers. However, several important functions remained with the governor. In the governor’s capacity as symbolic head of the national government, the governor retained the power to dissolve and hold new elections in parliament, and, in his role as representative of the Kingdom government in the Netherlands Antilles, the

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51 The twenty-two members of the Antillean Parliament were chosen by universal franchise. Voting publics on Curacao elected twelve of the twenty-two seats, while, in a major defeat for Aruban nationalist parties – who aimed to achieve parity in seat distribution – Aruban residents elected eight members of parliament. The remaining two seats were to be chosen by Bonaire and by St. Maarten, St. Eustatius, and Saba collectively.

52 These ministers were appointed by the Antillean Parliament, and were responsible to the parliament. As such, after 1951, the governor no longer exercised any independent authority.
governor could reject any ordinance deemed contrary to the mutual interests of the Kingdom.\textsuperscript{53}

In this way, though the national government exercised autonomy in internal affairs, its status within the Kingdom of the Netherlands ensured the ongoing intervention of the Netherlands in issues of mutual interest to the Kingdom countries.\textsuperscript{54}

Quickly following the enactment of the Interim Regulation, the royal proclamation of the ERNA on March 14, 1951 expanded the autonomy of each of the island territories and placed a range of administrative responsibilities under the control of a local island administration. Daily management over the affairs of each island territory rested in the Administrative College formed by a lt. governor, who served as the college’s chairman, and several deputies selected by the Island Council (eilandsraad), whose members were popularly elected and served four-year terms.\textsuperscript{55} Yet, while the autonomy of each island territory certainly expanded through the ERNA, the regulations of national and Kingdom governments remained superior. According to the terms of the ERNA, each island territory was obliged to cooperate in the implementation of national regulations or decrees and the lt. governor, whose primary task was to determine whether island regulations came into conflict with national or Kingdom-wide agreements, would be appointed by the Dutch crown.\textsuperscript{56} As such, island administrators answered to the bodies of national and Kingdom governance.

\textsuperscript{53} If a governor deemed any national law or ordinance contrary to the mutual interests of the Kingdom, the Dutch crown would then review and make a decision on the case. Further, as representative of the Kingdom government, the governor was obliged to consider the advice of the Dutch crown.

\textsuperscript{54} Oostindie and Klinkers, \textit{Knellende Koninkrijksbanden}, 116-17.

\textsuperscript{55} While the ERNA did not stipulate which subjects would be considered “island affairs,” the document did detail those areas that fell beyond the scope of island territory jurisdictions. Generally, the ERNA restricted island territories from interfering in regulations that applied uniformly to the whole country, including subjects related to “civil and commercial law, civil procedure, criminal law, criminal procedure, notaries, the law in administrative litigation and tax matters, as well as the composition and powers of the judiciary.” For the full text see, “KONINKLIJK BESLUIT van 3 Maart 1951, houdende de eilandenregeling Nederlandse Antillen,” Overheid.nl, http://decentrale.regelgeving.overheid.nl/cvdr/XHTMLOutput/Historie/Nederlandse%20Antillen/7402/7402_1.html, accessed 10 March 2015.

\textsuperscript{56} Oostindie and Klinkers, \textit{Knellende Koninkrijksbanden}, 117-19. Should the lt. governor deem any island regulation in conflict with national or Kingdom-wide agreements, he must then refer the matter to the governor for resolution.
The protest movement displayed a sophisticated knowledge of these emerging governing structures. Nearly all major petitions and declarations by the two primary arms of the protest movement—one led by religious women’s organizations and the other by religious leaders—were sent simultaneously to local authorities, national officials in the Antillean capital, and governing organs in the Netherlands. Initially, protesters addressed their petitions to the Lt. governor of Aruba, who responded to the nascent protest movement by simultaneously attempting to relocate the proposed brothel further away from residential areas and quietly accelerating plans to finalize the building of the brothel. On May 16, 1951, acting Governor of the Netherlands Antilles F.A. Jas—an unelected official appointed by the Dutch monarch—signed a national decree approving the lease of 17,000 square meters of government land to N.V. Pereira and J.M. Debrot. Although Debrot and his allies in government agreed not to discuss the lease, within ten days word had leaked to the public. In the week following this revelation, the protest movement publicized their cause in the Netherlands and on Curaçao. In a series of telegrams dispatched on the day of mass demonstrations in Oranjestad, protest leaders Villaba and Chong jettisoned moral arguments and instead drew attention to Campo’s infraction of two Antillean and metropolitan laws: those prohibiting the facilitation of prostitution by a third party and the ban on brothels. In two telegrams addressed to the governor of the Netherlands Antilles in his dual capacity as head of the national government and representative of the Kingdom in Curaçao, Villaba and Chong called for the “restoration and enforcement of Curaçaoan law regarding prostitution,” while also urgently requesting that the governor notify “higher

58 Early correspondence from the Roman Catholic Women’s League and the Catholic association Liga di Maria in March 1951 to Lt. Governor Kwartz lays bare this initial strategy. Villaba and Chong of the Women’s League pledged, “We Aruban women and mothers take this issue to heart … and will put pressure on the situation and continue to speak loudly so that we might be supported by all those in the Netherlands who hold dear Christian principles and respectability,” ANA, BCAR 1951-1961, Bestrijding der Onzedelijkheid, invr. nr. 347, DS-13474, correspondence to Lt. Governor, 12 March 1951.
authorities in the Netherlands.” Villaba and Chong then took matters into their own hands, issuing a telegram directly to Queen Juliana of the Netherlands requesting the enforcement of Dutch law to ensure “no tolerance for foreign prostitutes, no tolerance for public lechery.” While it is unclear whether protesters expected much from these appeals, the protest movement nevertheless availed itself of the hierarchical nature of the Kingdom.

The mass demonstrations against Campo Alegre at the end of May significantly altered the previously dismissive attitude of local administrators and compelled a range of elected parliamentarians to involve themselves in the Campo debate. On May 30, 1951, thousands of people—the vast majority of them women—marched to government offices in Oranjestad demanding the reversal of the national decree. Sympathetic onlookers described this event as an unparalleled historic occasion and celebrated the protest’s democratic spirit of inclusion. While the leadership of the protest movement included largely middle-class women, the nearly 3,000 people who protested in the streets of Oranjestad and San Nicolas at the end of May drew a wider cross-section of society into the Campo debate. One author observed, “old and young, mother, partner, betrothed, from all walks of life, gathered … to defend husbands, young men, and fiancés against the attack of money-minded people who make a vile profit by taking away the most precious of what God gave to women in his unending overflowing love.” For some, the protest was not simply an outpouring of faith but a deeply spiritual experience. One

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59 BNA, DAC, anonymous scrapbook, telegrams from Clarita Villaba and Marianita Chong to the Governor of the Netherlands Antilles as Head of the National Government and to the Governor of the Netherlands Antilles as Koninkrijksorgaan, 30 May 1951.

60 BNA, DAC, anonymous scrapbook, telegram from Clarita Villaba and Marianita Chong to Her Majesty Juliana Queen of the Netherlands, 30 May 1951.

61 As Kleijn and Schrover point out in “The Dutch State as a Pimp,” (45) clergy in all of the churches on Aruba preached against the brothel on May 27, which undoubtedly played a role in rallying thousands to the protest. While they are right to highlight the role of the clergy in organizing protesters, records in Aruban archives show that the earliest complaints received by the local administration came from the women who eventually led the protest movement.

62 “Nog een overpeinzing over het Campo Alegre op Aruba,” Amigoe di Curacao, June 1, 1951, p. 3.
commentator pointed to the contrast between the protest movement’s modest tactics—a hodgepodge of homemade signs attached to broomsticks and riddled with Dutch spelling errors, a testament to the humble social status of the protesters—and its striking moral uprightness: “this was the instinctive response of 500 years of Christendom … you looked and you felt a strange lump in your throat: this was the soul of Aruba speaking.”

Officials scrambled to respond to the protest. Members of parties who had been elected to represent Aruba in the Antillean government, and whose parties had much to lose if they did not neutralize the conflict before Aruba’s first-ever Island Council election in June, seized the opportunity to placate protesters and redeem their own tarnished reputations. Yet, as politicians competed amongst each other to claim the moral high ground for themselves and their respective parties, confusion emerged about the scope of local authority to initiate or reverse the policy on prostitution and the accountability between island and national branches of government. On June 1, 1951 the Antillean Parliament declared the national decree a “political mistake” and approved the formation of a committee to study prostitution in San Nicolas. Aruban parliamentarians in particular rushed to revise their position on Campo in view of the fast-approaching Island Council election. AVP leader Henny Eman circulated pamphlets claiming that he never supported the brothel. Instead, Eman maintained he had only approved of the building of a cabaret. The Minister of Justice of the Netherlands Antilles and fellow AVP member W.F.M. Lampe came under especially heavy criticism because of rumors that Debrot funded his political campaign. Lampe swiftly proposed new regulations to the Antillean parliament that prohibited both the licensing of foreign prostitutes and the registration of

63 Amigoe di Curação, 1 June 1951, p. 3.
65 “Nog een overpeinzing over het Campo Alegre op Aruba,” Amigoe di Curação, 1 June 1951, p. 3.
66 “Politieke Overpeinzing,” Amigoe di Curação, 29 May 1951, p. 3.
domestic sex workers. It was acting Dutch Governor Jas, however, whose dramatic change of heart secured the victory of the protest movement. In a theatrical speech on June 19, 1951, Jas declared the Campo question a matter of the past, vowing that no Campo would be built on the island. Additionally, Jas ordered the repeal of licenses for foreign prostitutes and prohibited further “importation” of foreign women. Embracing the protest movement’s nationalist rhetoric, he concluded his speech stating, “I call on the Aruban people to continue with me, and soon, with the chosen island administration, to fight against prostitution.”

While the protest movement welcomed Jas’s measures with gratitude, some of his colleagues in the Antillean government felt that he had overstepped his authority and violated the government’s democratic principles. In particular, Prime Minister of the Netherlands Antilles Dr. M.F.da Costa Gomez claimed that Jas’s actions showed a “disregard for parliamentary tradition” and faulted Jas’s controversial interpretation of the Interim Regulation. Lampe likewise challenged Jas’s authority and insisted his own regulations should take precedence over the acting governor’s. Indeed, Lampe’s measures dated two days earlier than those of Jas but had not reached Oranjestad in time to redeem the minister of Justice.

Undoubtedly, the political changes of 1951 increased the accountability of officials to their constituents and opened a range of venues in which protesters could seek redress at the same time that they offered politicians a new degree of latitude. Though some protesters adeptly navigated state structures to press for the restoration of law and morality, the nature of these reformed political bonds—especially those between Curaçao and Aruba—also provoked feelings

of anxiety and uncertainty. Taken together, the anti-Curaçaoan sentiment of the protest movement and the strategic leveraging of the Kingdom’s multitiered structure are remarkable not least for how they conform to prevailing aspirations for decolonization. This is perhaps most evident in the seemingly ubiquitous assertion—shared by some of Campo’s elite supporters in the AVP and its most virulent detractors in the protest movement—that Aruban identity was distinct from and under threat by Curaçao and thus deserved special protection from the Netherlands. Yet, the protest movement often appealed to the legislative authority of Curaçao over Aruba in an attempt to halt the development of a Campo Alegre, thus exploiting federal connections even as they denounced the problematic precedent of Curaçao’s Campo. More still, the pursuit of external intervention by governing authorities in Curaçao and the Netherlands misrecognized (perhaps strategically) the locus of the Campo question. Dutch colonial authorities who had been instrumental in advocating for regulated prostitution on Curaçao and in establishing that island’s government-run brothel did not become the target of the protest movement’s censure. Instead, the protest movement’s assumptions about blame and accountability in the Campo affair reflected in many ways local political ambition to sever ties with Curaçao and the remaining Dutch Antillean islands and in its place strengthen bonds with the Netherlands.

**The Promise of Morality**

The protests against Campo Alegre on Aruba drew thousands of island residents into public demonstration. While neighborhood, familial, and religious networks undoubtedly did much to rally upwards of three thousand island residents against state-regulated prostitution, the protest movement’s repeated emphasis on the vulnerability of domestic stability galvanized some
supporters around Campo’s threat to household harmony and reflected broader ambivalence and uncertainty about the sweeping political and economic changes of the 1940s-50s.

The posters and pamphlets of the protest movement offer insight into how the movement addressed itself to and mobilized its supporters. Written predominantly in Papiamento, posters circulated in San Nicolas contained messages such as “Women of Aruba! Protest against the danger that awaits your husband or boyfriend!” and “Women of Aruba! Come forth for your family. A Campo Alegre is destructive to your domestic peace.”71 When protesters descended on the streets of Oranjestad at the end of May, makeshift posters warned female onlookers that “the government is looking for a new home for your husbands.”72 The Antillean press likewise predicted the impending dissolution of household harmony. One fictionalized story printed in Amigoe di Curaçao envisioned the nightmarish impact of a Campo Alegre on Aruban households, telling the story of two adolescent males who, until the opening of the brothel, had contentedly passed their evenings playing card games on the porch. On the first night the brothel opened its doors, the sons abandoned the porch and did not return home until midnight. On the second night, they did not return at all.73 Echoing this perceived threat to Aruban manhood and familial stability, the conservative Arubaanse Courant cautioned in an open letter to the “women of Aruba” that Campo would deliver “great danger to the moral and physical welfare of our homes. A danger to our husbands, sons, fathers, brothers and boyfriends.”74

These repeated articulations of Campo’s threat to Aruban families—and women’s alleged responsibility for male chastity—distinguish this abolitionist campaign from countless others.

Unlike some struggles against prostitution throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth

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71 BNA, DAC, anonymous scrapbook, protest poster, n.d.
72 Quoted in “A Problem of Two Professions,” TIME, 18 June 1951, n.p.
centuries, where middle-class feminist groups purportedly came to the rescue of “fallen women,” Aruba’s protest movement rallied around a xenophobic rejection of sex workers. In this way, the protest against regulated prostitution on Aruba echoed the anti-blackness of nineteenth-century Puerto Rican feminists who, as Eileen Findlay argues, rejected Afro-Puerto Rican women and sex workers from understandings of “common sisterhood”—a discourse motivated by racial hatred and the threat of sexual competition alike.

The vulnerability of Aruban manhood likewise emerges in official response to the protest. In questions posed to numerous medical professionals, police personnel, Lago managers and other island leaders, the committee formed to study prostitution on Aruba in May 1951 repeatedly asked how prostitution might imperil male youth. The idea that looser systems of regulation induced youthful male curiosity and offered “public lessons in seduction” guided the official defense of Aruba’s Campo Alegre in the government’s initial interactions with the protest movement. Again, the defense of male youth by some governing officials presented a dramatic change in emphasis from the 1942 committee formed to study prostitution on Curacao, which authorized the regulation of prostitution on the grounds “that the cleanliness and virginity of many of our girls are in great danger of being lost.”

Whether such anxieties about male vulnerability and threats to domestic harmony were strategic or sincere is difficult to determine. What is clear, however, is that the protest movement was not the only party to express anxiety about the resilience of Aruban manhood. Island leadership, too, worried about rising male unemployment and overdependence on Lago,
the island’s largest industry and employer. During the war, the Allied demand for oil drew an unprecedented number of Aruban males into employ at Lago—a practice that reversed the refinery’s earlier reliance on English-speaking foreign contract laborers. However, the end of the war and the eventual recovery of the European economy scaled back the wartime boom in Lago’s productivity as well as the demand for local labor. By 1951, many officials cited rising unemployment, worsening economic conditions, and labor relations—especially pronounced during a massive strike at Lago in the summer of 1951—as the primary cause of slackening public morality. In meticulously plotted graphs, officials charted rising unemployment alongside increased reports of divorce, sexual violence, public drunkenness, theft, and pregnancy out of wedlock. In this way, too, official anxieties over public morality dovetailed with the protest movement’s concerns, even as these groups at times differed in their thinking on how best to address the crises afflicting Aruban manhood.

The boom and subsequent bust years of the war and its immediate aftermath were disorienting if also ultimately transformative years for Aruba. If the war brought a dizzying sense of optimism to the island, the end of the war provoked broad uncertainties over how to best sustain these gains. The brief flurry of international attention that Aruba garnered in its important wartime role soon failed to captivate even metropolitan Dutch officials, who by the war’s end focused their attention on the explosive conflicts unfolding in Indonesia’s struggle for

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79 The vast majority of Lago’s foreign employees, who constituted nearly half of the refinery’s workforce in 1951, were men of African descent from the Anglophone Caribbean. Statistics are drawn from Alofs and Merkies, *Ken ta Arubiano?*, 114-15.


81 In these same conversations, some officials also connected Aruba’s economic woes to its political status within the Netherlands Antilles. As an integral part of the Netherlands Antillean state, Aruba, like other islands within the Antillean constellation, was compelled to recognize the right of other Antillean islanders to live and work on Aruba. See ANA, BCAR 1951-1961, Eilandsraad Notulen 1951-1961, Minutes of the Island Council, August 1951. ANA, BCAR 1951-1961, Bestrijding der Onzedelijkheid, invr. nr. 544, DS-606-6, report following the departure of foreign prostitutes by Hendrik Cornelis Willemsen, Police Commissioner on Aruba, 12 May 1955.
independence. Changes in the economic landscape paired with disappointments on the political stage, including the failure of the Aruban separatist movement and the defeat of more moderate proposals to establish equivalence among Aruban and Curaçaoan seats in parliament, compounded for some the sense of Aruba’s marginality and dependence. Undoubtedly these changes reached into Antillean households in vexing and personal ways. Such rationale might go a long way toward explaining how several thousand people came to be so convinced of the threat of Campo Alegre to members of their family and not, as it were, the thousands of anonymous sailors and foreign refinery workers whom the brothel was allegedly intended to serve. The protest movement’s implicit promise of moral uprightness and its attendant aspiration of domestic harmony perhaps offered an empowering if idealistic message in an atmosphere of uncertainty and change. What’s more, by late summer of 1951, the protest movement had succeeded where politicians failed: although Aruba would not become politically or economically autonomous that year, the protest movement had helped to forge an image of Aruban moral autonomy.

**Aftermath and Conclusion**

The 1951 protest against Campo Alegre on Aruba profoundly inflected the tenor of the island’s sexual politics and the spirit of Aruban separatism. Testing the nascent mechanisms of the decolonizing state, the protest movement compelled public officials to halt plans to develop Campo Alegre and, by August 1951, to send away the island’s foreign prostitutes. This victory for the protest movement came as a blow to those who profited from commercial sex on the island while also presenting a dilemma for local officials who lacked both the resources and the

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82 Oostindie and Klinkers, *Decolonising the Caribbean*, 71-73.
gumption to address the precipitous increase in domestic prostitution. The conflicting interests of these various groups, and the ways in which each came into stunning conflict in the spring and summer 1951, has exerted a lasting influence on Aruba’s treatment of commercial sex work. Specifically, the legacy of the protest movement of 1951 is most evident in the continued reticence of the island leadership to confront the “prostitution question” with a coherent policy of tolerance and regulation. Instead, in the years following the protest, officials responded ambiguously to aggrieved café owners in San Nicolas who, citing destitution and bankruptcy, demanded the return of foreign prostitutes. By 1954, a significant number of foreign women had entered Aruba on two-week transit permits designated for “saleswomen” (koopvrouwtoeristen). Much like in the days before the Campo question emerged, these women headed for the streets of San Nicolas and clandestinely practiced their trade in the backrooms of bars and clubs.

The threat of protest lay behind any subtle move to invite foreign prostitutes back to Aruba. With the increased presence of saleswomen after 1954, familiar players in the protest movement, including Catholic women’s associations and clergy, sent angry letters in defense of the “good name of Aruba.” This time, however, they were joined by a chorus of voices in

84 In December 1951, twenty café owners signed a letter pleading the lt. governor to permit each café “to import a pair of female workers [krachten] for the business,” a move the Island Council at first passively tolerated and then, after 1957, sanctioned in the form of issuing three-month-long tourist visas to “adult entertainers.” Quoted in ANA, BCAR 1951-1961, Bestrijding der Onzedelijkheid, 1957-1960, invr. nr. 1.764, DS-65-10, Letter from twenty café owners to the Executive Council (Bestuurscollege) of Aruba, 8 December 1951.
85 The Police Commissioner on Aruba estimated in November 1955 that around thirty foreign women were present on Aruba as “saleswomen.” Saleswomen were legally granted fourteen-day “transit permission” (transitopermissie) on Aruba. The Police Commissioner also estimated that the number of domestic prostitutes had increased after 1951, claiming that seventy-eighty women from the Dutch Antilles worked as prostitutes on Aruba, thirty-three of whom came from Curaçao and allegedly only nine from Aruba. Cited in ANA, BCAR 1951-1961, Bestrijding der Onzedelijkheid, 1957-1960, invr. nr. 1.764, DS-65-10, Attachments to the notes of the Island Council of Aruba, 12 November 1955.
newly established social welfare initiatives such as the Foundation for the Promotion of Mental Health on Aruba (*Stichting ter Bevordering van de Geestelijke Volksgezondheid op Aruba*) and the Aruban Foundation to Combat Alcohol Abuse (*Stichting Bestrijding Alcoholmisbruik Aruba*).\(^{87}\) As Margo Groenewoud has also argued of the postwar period on Curaçao, economic modernization and the initiation of decolonization policy empowered actors to organize beyond the traditional framework of the Catholic Church, thus increasing the participation of secular associations in education, social work and health care.\(^{88}\) And so it was within this diverse landscape of social actors in 1957 that the island government of Aruba quietly permitted a number of registered cafés to hire “adult entertainers” (*animeermeisjes*) from abroad. Though careful to never label these foreign entertainers as prostitutes in public, in private correspondence governing officials bluntly conceded that such semantic deceptions were necessary for resolving this hot-button and “centuries-old social question”\(^{89}\) on Aruba. Aruban officials defended the provisional return of such foreign entertainers, claiming that without these *animeermeisjes* the number of Curaçaoan prostitutes on Aruba would only increase.\(^{90}\)

Although Aruba did return to a minimally regulated system of prostitution after 1957, the protest movement can nevertheless be regarded as impactful on several counts. First, the absence of a Campo Alegre on Aruba testifies to the efficacy of the movement. Barring a centralized, regulated brothel from existing on Aruba was, after all, the original goal of the protest movement and its primary reason for being. Second, the protest movement succeeded in

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\(^{88}\) Groenewoud, “The Catholic Church in Modern (Post-) Colonial Curaçao,” 61.  
establishing the terms of debate in 1951 and in the decades that followed, and compelled the local government to respond to the protest’s demands using the very rhetoric of the protest movement itself. This was most evident in the local government’s insistence after the protests of 1951 that any changes related to prostitution policy would benefit and protect the spirit of the Aruban nation. Lastly, the continued reticence to legally recognize foreign prostitutes on Aruba remains another striking legacy of the Campo Alegre protest. Though the system of regulation forged in 1957 has since undergone several significant changes—namely, the cordoning off of a red-light district in San Nicolas and the strict enforcement of weekly medical checkups with government doctors—sex workers are still recognized by the law as adult entertainers/animeermeisjes rather than as prostitutes. Some experts claim that the patchy system of regulation in the now small and deindustrialized town of San Nicolas, and the dubious terms under which foreign sex workers enter the island, have significantly raised prospects for human trafficking.91 While an analysis of contemporary concerns over prostitution on Aruba falls beyond the scope of this chapter, it is nevertheless remarkable that the decisions resulting from the protest movement of 1951 and its aftermath have continued to hold sway on Aruba.

Two insights follow from this analysis of the Campo Alegre debate. First, by including actors often marginalized in traditional political histories of decolonization in the Antilles, the imbrication of sexual politics within other kinds of politics comes into stark relief. Locating the points of connection between the politics of decolonization, Aruban separatism and concerns over appropriate morality, gender roles, and ethnic and racial propriety helps to revise our understandings of decolonization and the subjects it traditionally involves. In the Campo protest of 1951, a legion of largely middle-class women powerfully channeled their hopes, fears, and

anxieties through democratic processes. While theirs does not at first seem to be a struggle concerned with decolonization, the Campo debate tested the democratic reflexes of the postcolonial Dutch Antillean state at the same time that it gave vent to the anxieties produced by reformed political bonds.

Second, and not least, in powerfully marshaling a notion of a distinct Aruban identity, the protest movement fits not only within the tangled history of sexual politics on the island but perhaps most strikingly within the history of the island’s struggle to extricate itself from the Antillean constellation. In their repeated appeals to a separate Aruban identity, participants in the 1951 protest movement—much like leading Aruban politicians—located the drama of colonialism not within the relationship between metropole and colony, but among the islands themselves. In this way, the fight against Campo Alegre might also be regarded as a critical stage in the transformation of Aruban separatism from a political goal into a social project.

While the Campo Alegre protest may not fit easily alongside episodes of radical and revolutionary anticolonialism happening elsewhere in the colonial world, it merits attention precisely for the ways in which it departs from the received wisdom of empire’s end. The Campo protest was not a displacement of attention away from the substantive issues of decolonization and colonial hierarchies, but, as I have hoped to demonstrate, an engagement within and against those very dynamics. Leveraging the evolving structures of the decolonizing state, the protest movement exploited the island’s non-sovereign status to plead for intervention against an array of perceived enemies, whether foreign prostitutes, Curaçaoan sex workers, or leadership on both Aruba and Curaçao. At times, the movement’s strategies stood at odds with its goals. Most notably, the protest movement railed against Aruban leadership even as it adopted and popularized notions of a distinct and precious Aruban identity shared by those very leaders.
Indeed, what the Campo protest illustrates is not only the remarkable urgency of intercolonial conflict at empire’s end, but also the incredible diversity of political possibilities emerging from imperial collapse. For the protest movement of 1951 as for the eventual leaders of Aruban autonomy, leveraging the multilayered structures of a commonwealth state seemed the most expedient way to protect “the soul of Aruba.” While increased scholarly attention to these clever models of statehood has proven that independence was neither obvious nor preferred at empire’s end, it is by reading across the fault lines of the political and the personal that we can broaden our view not only of the trajectory of decolonization, but also its social resonances.
Chapter Three

"Sexuality, Yes! Slavery, No!": Reproductive Politics in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, 1960s-1980s

Numerous global developments reverberated across the European and Caribbean shores of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in the 1960s-1980s. Decolonization, radical anti-colonial revolt and the Black Power movement, as well as sexual revolution and the mainstreaming of women’s rights intersected with demands for enhanced autonomy and greater collaboration in the islands of the Dutch Antilles. Starting with the founding of the first family planning campaign in the Antilles in 1965, these demands became intertwined with discussion of overpopulation and the unfinished project of postcolonial modernization in the Kingdom’s Caribbean territories. In this way, debate on reproductive politics drew a remarkably diverse body of actors into conversation. The family planning campaigns of the 1960s brought together Catholic clergy, Protestant leadership, Jewish rabbis, Antillean governing officials and doctors, Curacaoan union leaders, radical Antillean activists, and representatives of the local Rotary Club and Credit Union. European Dutch actors, too, weighed in on the dangers of overpopulation and economic duress that threatened the forward momentum of modernization in the Dutch Antilles. European Dutch scholars, public health experts, and policy makers overseeing development programs in the Antilles also converged on the discursive field of reproductive politics. The surprising alliances among these groups, and the varying ways in which their views on women’s reproduction coincided with aspirations for political and economic modernization, is the subject of this chapter.
This chapter explores this history in three phases. First, it surveys the first family planning campaign founded on Curaçao in 1965 and the unexpected coalition of doctors, priests, rabbis, ministers and union leaders who collaborated to stem the perceived threat of overpopulation. These campaigns simultaneously deployed conservative assumptions about the nuclear household with its separate spheres for men and women along with new and arguably progressive incitements to form mutually pleasurable and respectful relationships. In addition, the campaign’s emphasis on “responsible parenthood” drew on the same profoundly racialized concept of “responsibility” discussed in chapter one, highlighting the long undoing of slavery and colonial racism, and the ways in which these legacies resonated in the intimate realms of the household. In their effort to restrict the fertility of cash-poor black women on Curaçao, family planning campaigners looked to the Netherlands for material and intellectual support, leveraging Kingdom ties to push Antillean society in the direction of the former metropole, where the increased availability of birth control and liberalizing attitudes on sexual mores corresponded with declining birthrates in the postwar period.

Secondly, I turn to the radicalization of discourses on reproductive politics in the 1960s-1980s. Actors on the far left on Curaçao shared with the conservative founders of the family planning campaign the belief that overpopulation threatened the future development of the Netherlands Antilles. Yet, unlike family planning campaigners, socialists in the oil refinery workers union and radical Antillean student groups in the Netherlands supported the full independence of the Netherlands Antilles as the best path forward. In the decades of unprecedented political mobilization in the 1960s-1970s, these actors argued that it was the revolutionary duty of Curaçaoan women to restrict their fertility in order to advance political and economic modernization on the island. By the mid 1970s, however, and with the entry of
Curaçaoan feminists into radical politics, the tone and tenor of reproductive politics shifted markedly. Curaçaoan feminists and other allied women’s groups insisted on the expansion of reproductive freedoms as part of a broader project to dismantle discriminatory laws against women—many of them leftover from Dutch colonial rule. Like the radical union leaders and student groups who inspired them, these feminists also supported the independence of the Netherlands Antilles and viewed this goal as integral to the struggle for and achievement of women’s emancipation.

Finally, this chapter considers European Dutch responses to Antillean pleas for collaboration in family planning schemes and the radical disavowal of Kingdom ties. Initially supportive of family planning campaigns in the Antilles, Dutch policy makers abruptly withdrew development aid for family planning projects in the aftermath of anti-colonial revolt on Curaçao in 1969. Tying together these varied conversations on reproductive rights, this chapter argues above all that reproductive politics became a critical site of imperial undoing in the 1960s-1980s. Despite the convergence of actors on the field of reproductive politics, not all of them agreed on how the Antilles should become a modern postcolonial society, with the founders of family planning campaigns looking to strengthen bonds across the Atlantic and radical leftists and feminists seeking to abolish them. European Dutch actors, too, were keenly aware of the importance of their ongoing meddling in intimate affairs and, with the prospect of Antillean independence looming, distanced themselves from efforts to regulate the sexuality and reproductive health of Antillean Dutch.

While scholars have productively explored the regulation of women’s fertility under European colonial rule, fewer studies have examined how discussion of women’s fertility factored into anti-colonial movements or within projects to strengthen bonds of cooperation
between former metropole and colony. Attention to these issues highlights not only how reproductive politics helped to mobilize support and opposition for closer collaboration on reproductive issues in the Kingdom. It also brings to the fore the extent to which intimacy is imbricated within the unmaking of colonial rule. In the 1960s-1980s, reproductive politics emerged as a potent channel for reformulating postcolonial relationships.

“Plan Your Family In Advance!”

As discussed in chapter two, the transition to autonomy in the Antilles coincided with a short-lived period of economic prosperity, particularly on Curaçao—the capital of the Netherlands Antilles and the most populous islands—where the presence of a Shell oil refinery provided near full employment for the island’s male population. By the end of the 1950s, however, the national climate shifted from one of optimism to fear. In 1953, the last Dutch colonial governor Struycken predicted, “with the decline in the oil industry, the whole matter of overpopulation will be completely let loose.” By the end of that decade, mechanization at the Isla refinery resulted in mass unemployment and the scaling back of Shell’s social welfare

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By 1960, unemployment soared to over twenty percent. The consequences resonated in the most intimate of atmospheres. In the years after mass layoffs, the birthrate rose and, particularly troubling for public officials and religious elites was the fact that by 1962, thirty percent of children were born out of wedlock. Fears of terminal economic decline went hand-in-hand with anxieties that the island’s poorest residents were reproducing without any jobs or social services to absorb them. The onset of what would turn out to be protracted economic downturn paired with a rising birthrate revived anxieties about overpopulation on this tiny island. And it was this fear especially—the fear of overpopulation—that led to the creation of the first family planning initiative in the Netherlands Antilles.

The Foundation for the Promotion of Responsible Parenthood (*Stichting tot Bevordering van Verantwoord Ouderschap*), locally known as Famia Planea, was established on Curaçao on October 1, 1965. The initiative was largely the brainchild of Dr. Sergio Leon, the first on Curaçao to professionalize the field of obstetrics and gynecology. When Leon returned to his native island in 1962 after completing his medical training in the US, he was appalled not only by the deplorable state of healthcare on the islands but also by what he perceived as the uninformed attitudes among the island’s population. For Leon, this was evidenced in the high rates of illegitimacy, and the large number of children born to impoverished, single mothers.

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4 The combined efforts of the late colonial government and Shell to incentivize marital unions among working-class Curaçaoans are the subject of chapter one. In short, in 1947, Shell workers gained a number of benefits, including affordable housing for families, and free healthcare for legal wives and children. Dutch sociologist Eva Abraham-van der Mark showed in her research on the Afro-Curaçaoan family how these measures corresponded to a rise in marital rates and a declining percentage of illegitimate births in *Yu’i Mama*.


6 The percentage of illegitimate births reached its lowest point in 1952 (23.9%). This number rose somewhat steadily thereafter, accelerating after economic downturn, reaching 27.9% of live births in 1960 and 34.9% in 1967, Abraham-Van der Mark, *Yu’i Mama*, 15. The Dutch colonial regime left behind a bevy of legal codes dating back to this country’s own moral panic in 1911, and which restricted, among other things, advertising birth control methods to minors and criminalized abortion.
The doctor thus rallied the support of leading religious institutions on the island in order to undertake a massive educational campaign “to promote the idea of responsible parenthood among the people in the broadest sense of the term, and taking into account the official standpoints of the churches and the cultural and religious convictions in our society.”

The education of “responsible parenthood” became the central goal of Famia Planea and a guiding ideology that shaped all of the foundation’s outreach and activism, which took the form of lectures, advertisements, TV and radio programs, private client consultations and public demonstrations. In the several clinics established by Famia Planea across Curaçao, nurses offered basic education on reproductive health and anatomy, instruction on methods of birth control, and affordable medical services. Moreover, Famia Planea’s emphasis on responsible parenthood rallied the cooperation of all of the major religious institutions on the island. The foundation’s administration consisted of representatives from the Diocese of Willemstad, the council of Protestant Churches, Mikvé Israel, a Jewish synagogue, the Association of Physicians on the Netherlands Antilles, the Rotary Club and local Credit Union.

What communal crisis did the Foundation respond to, and who was responsible for it? In Famia Planea’s educational materials and in their numerous public broadcasts on the radio, campaigners warned against the threat of unfettered population growth on Curaçao. In an early radio broadcast in 1968, a spokesperson for Famia Planea asserted, “The Foundation not only

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7 NA, Archief van de Kabinet van de Vice-Minister-President (1959-1972), Kabinet voor Surinaamse en Nederlands-Antilliaanse Zaken (hereafter KabSNA), 2.10.41, inv. nr. 553. Letter from Minister Plenipotentiary of the Netherlands Antilles E. Jonckheer to Vice Minister President, 1 April 1968.
8 Religious cooperation mostly manifested in willingness to provide Famia Planea with its official standpoint on birth control and family planning. This constituted a radical departure from traditional healthcare practices. Not only were hospitals and healthcare primarily under Catholic control, but so too, were the schools, where sex education and discussion of reproductive biology received frightfully little attention. When a client visited one of Famia Planea’s clinics, they could indicate their religious preference and a nurse would then relay the official standpoint of the church on family planning and direct clients to priests or other religious leaders for further questioning. See NA, KabSNA, 2.10.41, inv. nr. 553: TV Program, "The Encyclical Letter and Family Planning" 11 November 1968 and van Ditzhuijzen, Anyway..., 83-84.
wants to help bring a more harmonious marital life in the family, but moreover, its purpose is to
decrease the rapid growth of our population, in other words: to lend a hand to improve our socio-
economical situation.” Though Famia Planea made clear that all were welcome at their clinics,
the foundation emphasized in no uncertain terms that it was poor, unwed people who most
urgently needed to embrace family planning methods in order to prevent the collapse of the
Antillean state. The broadcast continued, “About 35 percent of the children born do not bear
their father's name. This human irresponsibility goes hand in glove with a lack of knowledge of
the possibilities to prevent pregnancy. As a consequence of the irresponsibility of many men and
women, many of the children born out of wedlock become a burden on the whole community.”
In this way, Famia Planea seized on overpopulation as a teachable moment. While the Catholic
Church on Curacao had long sought to promote marital monogamy, Famia Planea would
appropriate this discourse in some disturbingly familiar and shockingly new ways.

Among the more familiar themes of Famia Planea’s outreach was its emphasis on the
nuclear family and marital monogamy, with its separate spheres for men and women. In one
program that aired both on TV and radio entitled “Mommy, Who is My Daddy?” dramatic
images of crying, neglected babies flashed across the screen. The voice of a young boy
interrupted the infants crying, wistfully asking about his father’s identity. The show’s host
paused for dramatic effect before adding, “Yes, who might his father be?” The message was

9 NA, KabSNA, 2.10.41, inv. nr. 553, Scripts of Five Consecutive Radio Programmes of the Foundation for the
Promotion of Responsible Parenthood, Curacao, Netherlands Antilles, Broadcast in the last quarter of the year 1968
[in English].
10 Since the nineteenth century, the Catholic Church on Curacao had likewise sought to carry out a religious version
of the civilizing mission and promote the sanctity of marriage among the island’s predominantly Afro-Curaçao
population, who, prior to the abolition of slavery in 1863, were expressly forbidden from enjoying conjugal stability
or legal matrimony. More still, and well into the twentieth century, the Catholic Church continued to encourage
marital monogamy through social controls. As the Catholic Church controlled most educational and healthcare
institutions into the 1950s, administrators at these institutions prohibited so-called illegitimate children from
attending the same schools as children born in wedlock, and forbade expectant unwed mothers from delivering their
babies in the same part of the hospital as married mothers.
clear: single-parent households bred miserable and tortured children. Not only did the foundation emphasize the psychological harm done to children born out of wedlock, they also appealed to the desire for class mobility, promising that a “planned family was a happy family,” not least because planned families could afford luxury items and maintain proper division of duties between husband and wife. One expert on a TV panel commented:

many times a child without a father cannot receive a good education. His mother has to go out to work in order to support it…Sometimes the mother finds herself forced to start an affair with another man, just to improve her financial situation….but the result is, that she finds herself with more children…..and more misery!! When mother and father are married and live together more often this family can count on a fixed sum of money for the maintenance of the family. And there is no need for the mother to go out to work.¹¹

It is very clear from these and other examples that notions of parental responsibility were indeed inseparable from notions of the nuclear family with its separate spheres for men and women.

Reflective of their abiding paternalism, the founders of Famia Planea reserved special vitriol for negligent fathers. In the foundation’s annual report for 1967-68, founder Leon opined:

The most irresponsibly proliferating group of the weakly intelligent, who do not employ any form of birth control, appear to be so indolent that they no longer experience their misery as misery…They do not wish to exchange the laziness and carelessness with which they lead their sex lives for the responsibility one automatically acquires as the result of gaining greater knowledge on certain methods of birth control. This aversion to accepting responsibility seems to manifest more frequently in men than in women.¹²

Notions of appropriate gender roles and class behavior thus critically underlay this concept of responsible parenthood. In subtle though no less profound ways, the concept of responsible parenthood also mobilized racist stereotypes. This discourse on “responsibility” did not

¹¹ NA, KabSNA, 2.10.41, inv. nr. 553, TV Program, “Mommy, Who is My Daddy,” Scripts of Seven Consecutive Television Programs of the Foundation for the Promotion of Responsible Parenthood, Curacao, Neth. Antilles, Broadcast in the Last Quarter of the Year 1968 [in English].
originate with Famia Planea. Colonial officials, Shell, and the Catholic Church, among others, had long assumed the Western-style nuclear family as the ideal norm. As discussed in chapter one, the late-colonial emphasis on fostering “responsibility” was deeply racially encoded. Though Famia Planea did not invent this language, they did re-deploy it. In the process, Famia Planea implied that those families who deviated from marital monogamy were *irresponsible*, or, in the words of Dr. Leon, “indolent,” and “weakly intelligent.” Famia Planea mobilized stereotypes that equated blackness with sexual irresponsibility in order to rally concern about the dangers of overpopulation. Indeed, overpopulation gained its foreboding meaning only by raising the specter of a growing black lower class. Families who had the financial means to support a large number of children were not admonished to be “sexually responsible,” suggestive as well of the class dynamics of Famia Planea’s message. On Curaçao in the 1960s, however, race and class were differences without distinction.

There is vague anecdotal evidence to suggest that both the discourse on and the provision of family planning services was eugenic in nature. One doctor’s assistant at Famia Planea’s clinic in downtown Willemstad recalled that some physicians would simply remove a woman’s uterus if she had acute problems with fibroids—a condition that overwhelmingly affected black women on Curaçao.13 Colonial-era laws criminalizing abortion remained on the books after the transition to autonomy—indeed they are still there today—but by 1970 the outbreak of a rubella epidemic, which carried significant risk of birth defects, prompted the creation of a council to approve abortion on medical and later social indication. Although Famia Planea’s official standpoint emphasized, “The Foundation for Responsible Parenthood is there to help people plan

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their family, not to help them get rid of their pregnancy,”14 the reality was somewhat different. Some doctors who cooperated with Famia Planea interpreted the social indication quite broadly. As the doctor’s assistant recalled, “Look, there were lots of single-parent families. A mother with a child could only survive if she had a man in the house, and would then get pregnant again….That’s why we were rather liberal with abortions.”15 This assistant also recalled that many women who underwent the procedure on grounds of social indication were also simultaneously sterilized. Dr. Leon remembers this differently, claiming that many women preferred sterilization to other contraceptives like condoms or the pill so that they would not raise the suspicions of male partners who hoped to prove their virility. Scholars must be careful with this evidence. Elsewhere in the Caribbean, research has shown that sterilization was not always a coercive act. As Laura Briggs demonstrated for Puerto Rico, many women voluntarily elected sterilization when there was not adequate recourse to other contraceptive methods.16 We should also be cautious not to assume the victimization of women on Curaçao, where abortion was illegal and where the state health insurance for low-income individuals did not provide coverage for other forms of birth control.17 In this context, it is reasonable to assume that some women viewed sterilization as the most effective way to plan their families. While it is not always clear how consent was determined in these moments, it is certain that at various points exceptions were made to restrict the fertility of impoverished black women on Curaçao.

Such eugenic concerns were not unique to Famia Planea, or even to the postcolonial Caribbean. As Dagmar Herzog has argued, eugenic argumentation has had an uncomfortably
close relationship with battles for contraception and abortion. From the beginning of the twentieth century on, efforts to broaden contraception for women have, from their inception, sought to restrict the reproduction or “outbreeding” of the European lower classes, people of color, and the disabled. Eugenic attitudes entered forced sterilization campaigns as in the United States and Germany, as they did in the voluntary family planning campaigns in Sweden, India and Jamaica. For Famia Planera as no doubt for other family planning initiatives, the success of this foundation rested rather in the ambivalent ways that the Foundation marshaled both frankly racist and conservative viewpoints with progressive injunctions to broaden access to contraception and promote sex education. Without this doubleness, this holding fast to “traditional” family norms through broadening access to new contraceptive methods, Famia Planera would not have rallied the support that proved critical to its success: especially in gaining backers in the conservative Antillean government and the support of the churches.

It bears stating that Famia Planera very skillfully navigated a climate of religious conservatism and a legacy of legal repression dating back to the Dutch colonial government. As this chapter later explores, the emphasis on responsible parenthood—with all the trappings of Western norms of household organization—rallied the support of all major religious institutions on the island. In addition, however, the emphasis on responsibility in the foundation’s educational materials might also have been a strategic way to avoid breaking the law. In 1918, the Dutch colonial government introduced anti-vice legislation in the Caribbean territories.

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These laws directly mirrored those introduced in the Netherlands after moral panic gripped that country in the early twentieth century. One such law enacted in the Netherlands Antilles banned the advertisement of contraceptive methods, while another prohibited abortions and strengthened penalties for doctors who performed them.\(^{20}\) In the Netherlands, too, it took decades to reverse anti-vice legislation. Only in 1970 did the Netherlands repeal the ban on advertising contraception—precisely at the same time that this ban was lifted in the Netherlands Antilles.\(^{21}\) At least in the initial years of its activities, Famia Planea’s focus on parental responsibility rather than simple advertisement of contraception did not run them afoul of the law.

This fusion of the traditional and the progressive is perhaps most evident when considering the role of the Catholic Church in Famia Planea. All of the island’s major religious institutions participated in Famia Planea, even if only in an advisory capacity. With the exception of a 1965 donation of 300 Antillean guilder to cover the foundation’s registry cost with the local notary, the Catholic Church did not provide monetary assistance to Famia Planea. Yet, perhaps more significantly, some Catholic leaders enthusiastically endorsed the foundation and publicly supported its efforts.\(^{22}\) Clarification on the Church’s standpoint on family planning proved to be very urgent on Curaçao—and not simply because Catholicism was the majority religion on the island. In the wake of Vatican II (1962-65) and Pope Paul VI’s 1968 encyclical letter, “Humanae Vitae,” renewed confusion emerged about the church’s standpoint on birth control.

\(^{20}\) In the Antillean criminal code, Article 472 banned the advertisement of contraceptives to people below the age of 18 and Article 26 criminalized abortion. These laws were based off of Articles 451ter and 251bis in the Dutch criminal code.

\(^{21}\) Article 251bis, which criminalized abortion, was finally repealed in 1980 in the Netherlands, although women had been able to undergo the procedure safely and without tremendous fear of repercussion for roughly a decade prior. See Henny Brandhorst, “From Neo-Malthusianism to Sexual Reform: The Dutch Section of the World League for Sexual Reform,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 12 (2003): 38-67.

\(^{22}\) For Catholic support of family planning initiatives elsewhere, see Mary Roldán, “Acción Cultural Popular, Responsible Procreation, and the Roots of Social Activism in Rural Colombia,” *Latin American Research Review* 49 (2014): 27-44.
Especially after the encyclical letter, which was widely understood to ban all forms of “artificial” contraceptive methods, representatives from the Catholic Church in Famia Planea were called on to render the Church’s standpoint explicit. Father Cees Streefkerk, a Dutch priest on Curaçao and member of Famia Planea’s advisory board, took to the airwaves in 1968. Streefkerk maintained that those who took the encyclical letter as an “absolute NO” on the topic of birth control had not read it carefully enough. He continued, “The Pope is not against Family Planning, for we bear responsibility. He acknowledges that it is not responsible to have children, if one cannot maintain them. He takes the problems and ideas of our modern time into consideration: population explosion, emancipation of women, the idea that procreation is not the only purpose of marriage.” When the program’s host pushed Streefkerk to address whether observant Catholics could use “artificial” methods of birth control in the name of responsibility, Streefkerk responded, “Those Catholics who can keep to the words of the Pope, let them do so. Of course! Those who, for serious reasons, cannot, let them look for another way!… For serious reasons people can use them, if the rhythm method is not good for them. And such persons must not think themselves less Catholic or outside of the Church.”

In 1972, all of the religious organizations on the island would help Famia Planea to coordinate “Family Week,” dedicating a week of religious services to the theme of parental responsibility. The highlight of the week—a conference entitled “Procreation and Responsibility”—brought together Catholic priests, Anglican, Methodist and Reformed reverends, and a rabbi from the Hebrew Community before an audience of over 1,500 people. Famia Planea advertised the schedule on the radio with a short jingle set to the beat of local music that called on the community to “tackle the problem at its root for the salvation of our

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23 NA, KabSNA, 2.10.41, inv. nr. 553, TV Program, “The Encyclical Letter and Family Planning,” 11 November 1968, Scripts of Seven Consecutive Television Programs of the Foundation for the Promotion of Responsible Parenthood, Curacao, Neth. Antilles, Broadcast in the Last Quarter of the Year 1968 [in English].
country. Our family is OUR responsibility and must not be a burden for our society.”

With this curious jumble of associations – from religious salvation to national welfare and parental responsibility – major religious institutions on the island made family planning safe for consumption, and found ways to address thorny topics with surprising forthrightness.

In markedly progressive ways, secular members of Famia Planea addressed shifting norms on erotic love. In one radio broadcast in 1968, a nurse from Famia Planea discussed whether non-marital sex itself constituted “a lack of responsibility.” The nurse contended:

This is a question, which, in my opinion, cannot be answered just with a simple yes or no: A large group of people…are of the opinion that sexual intercourse is only permitted in marriage…And there is also a group of people who want more liberty in this field. In my opinion, every person as a human being has to bear responsibility for his actions. Both married and unmarried persons do not really behave like human beings if they do not take full account of their partner and the interest of the child who might get born.

Although the all-male board of Famia Planea upheld notions of the male breadwinner household, they did try to re-formulate and restrict norms surrounding male sexual license. One TV broadcast admonished its male viewership, “Times have changed. There is no need anymore for a man to be boasting about the amount of children he has, like in the old days! Nowadays only shame is left for such men.” Indeed, Dr. Leon would later reflect that it was this aspect of Famia Planea’s campaign—the challenge to male sexual license—that explained why the local island government never offered financial support for the foundation. Although the national Antillean government did subsidize the foundation’s operating costs, governing officials were

24 NA, KabSNA, 2.10.41 inv. nr. 553, Report on the Activities of the Foundation during the Year 1 April 1972-1 April 1973.
25 NA, KabSNA, 2.10.41 inv. nr. 553, Radio Program “Who is MY FATHER?????” Scripts of Five Consecutive Radio Programmes of the Foundation for the Promotion of Responsible Parenthood, Curacao, Neth. Antilles, Broadcast in the Last Quarter of the Year 1968 [in English].
26 NA, KabSNA, 2.10.41, inv. nr. 553, Program One, 14 August 1968, Scripts of Seven Consecutive Television Programs of the Foundation for the Promotion of Responsible Parenthood, Curacao, Neth. Antilles, Broadcast in the Last Quarter of the Year 1968.
not always supportive of augmenting laws in the service of promoting responsible parenthood. In Leon’s recently published biography, Leon recalled that the Antillean Governor laughed at his suggestion to introduce a paternity law that would make the biological father financially responsible for his child, claiming that members of Antillean parliament—many of whom allegedly fathered children out of wedlock—would never support such a measure.27

By framing the issue of responsible parenthood as one of fundamental importance to curbing the threat of overpopulation, Famia Planea and its supporters in the Antillean government sought to attract significant Dutch development aid for family planning efforts. They also leveraged Kingdom ties to send doctors from Curaçao for more advanced training in the Netherlands. Indeed, it was also with significant Dutch development aid that a new outpatient unit was established in Willemstad, and which would serve as a base for broadening family planning efforts and professionalizing nurses and doctors working in obstetrics care.28 In addition, Famia Planea doctors forged more informal ties with like-minded institutions in the Netherlands, calling on the Dutch Association for Sexual Reform (Nederlandse Vereniging voor Seksuele Hervorming, NSVH) to provide sex educational materials for use in schools, the content of which Famia Planea translated into English and Papiamentu.29 While historians of the modern Dutch Antilles have done excellent work on the political fiber of Kingdom ties, interesting in this case is the comparatively small scale but no less impactful and intimate ways

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27 Ditzhuijzen, Anyway..., 88. In 2012, the Curaçaoan government approved a paternity law. However, Leon criticized the efficacy of the law given that biological mothers still needed to report the biological father’s name in person at court instead of being given the option to provide the biological father’s name at the time of delivery.
28 See NA, KabSNA, 2.10.41, inv. nr. 412.
Kingdom ties inflected matters at once as quotidian and intimate as the content of sex education.  

Famia Planea’s founders and its supporters in the federal government believed in some measure that support from and contact with the Dutch government and Dutch institutions would be critical not only to the program’s survival, but also in reducing the threat of overpopulation that imperiled the country’s future. In a protracted correspondence with the Dutch Vice Minister President, the Antillean Governor requested the speedy approval of Dutch development aid considering “the fact that rapid population growth forms one of the foremost causes of our structural problems.” This particular exchange, dating back to 1968, would not be resolved for over a year. Thus, in the realm of reproductive politics, some leaders in the Antilles sought closer bonds with the Netherlands and understood these ties to be a matter of vital importance for the reproductive questions in the islands and, subsequently, to welfare in the Kingdom.

Throughout the 1960s, effective population control and reproductive health became important indicators of development across much of the globe. Within the Kingdom, the Netherlands emerged as the indisputable center of development and reproductive health. But the Antillean six-island state was riddled by its own internal frontiers, and family planning initiatives also played an important role in internal development schemes. Although Famia Planea expanded with success to neighboring Aruba in the 1960s, the Leeward Islands of St. Maarten, Saba and St. Eustatius were harder to reach both literally and figuratively. In the internal

30 I am indebted to Ann Stoler’s work on child-rearing manuals published in the Dutch East Indies, which she analyzed for their routine pronouncements on colonial power, intimacy, and race. See Stoler, Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power.
31 NA, KabSNA, 2.10.41, inv. nr. 553, Letter from Minister Plenipotentiary E. Jonckheer to Vice-Min-Pres, 26 June 1969.
33 Evidence of difficulty and challenges in forging inter-Antillean exchange on reproductive issues, especially
development plan for the Antillean state, known as D2, officials and researchers maintained that
the island of St. Eustatius—the poorest of any in the Antillean state—could not hope to see any
improvements without the widespread use of birth control. Dr. Eva Abraham-van der Mark, best
known as one of the first sociologists on the Afro-Curaçaoan household, carried out a report on
St. Eustatius for the Antillean government in 1975. In it, she stated, “Family planning must be
encouraged. Contraceptive mediums must be made available to Statians free of charge. Because
people begin having sex on Statia at such a young age, teenagers especially must be educated in
the most effective methods to prevent unwanted pregnancy.”

One European Dutch social
scientist who conducted an ethnography on Statia confirmed the dire situation there, claiming
that the most important purveyor of contraceptives on the island was a man who traveled to the
nearby island of St. Kitts to buy condoms in order to re-sell them at a mark-up to fellow Statians.
Yet, the author concluded, “because…he clarified that he had not sold more than 40 condoms in
two months, the use of condoms must be regarded as ‘incidental.’”

Although early annual reports from Famia Planea in the 1960s routinely emphasized
plans to establish family planning across the Dutch Antilles, these plans fizzled throughout the
1970s, in no small part because practical oversight proved challenging in a six-island state.
More still, a dearth of experts combined with overburdened and underfunded medical centers on

34 NA, KabSNA, 2.10.41, inv. nr. 1009, “Statia in Cijfers. Dr. Eva Abraham: Statianen geven heel, veel uit aan med.
kosten, veel aan voeding,” Amigoe, 22 September 1975.
35 Wout van Den Bor, Not too bad...Sociale organisatie; gezins- en familieverband op St. Eustatius: een oriënterend
vooronderzoek (Wageningen: Landbouwhogeschool, 1973), 73.
the smaller Leeward Islands hampered the progress of family planning initiatives there.\textsuperscript{36} In this way, reproductive politics helped to carve out the centers and peripheries of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, both across the Atlantic and within the Caribbean region itself.

Despite the uneven reach of Famia Planea across the islands, its efforts can be measured as a “success.” In 1970, the island’s birthrate declined from 35 to 23 per one thousand residents. However, looking to the continued prevalence of single parenthood on Curaçao, Leon feared that it was middle- and upper-class families who were restricting the number of children born, rather than the working-poor single mothers whom Leon most hoped to reach. While fears of overpopulation became less pronounced throughout the 1970s, new concerns about the prevalence of single motherhood quickly took their place in both the Antilles and the Netherlands—the subject of chapter four.

The successful mobilization of old discourses around decency and responsibility—concepts inseparable from those of race, gender, class and sexuality—together with new and progressive discussions on the importance of access to birth control helped to ensure the survival of Famia Planea. The latter would not have succeeded without the former, at least not in gaining the backing of the Antillean government and the major religious institutions of Curaçao. In framing the issue of reproductive politics as a matter of national need rather than an issue of rights, Famia Planea also succeeded, at least initially, in gaining the support of the Dutch government within the context of long-term development aid. In their appeals to both local and overseas institutions for funding and cooperation, Famia Planea tied reproductive issues to social and economic concerns in the Antilles, to the very survival of this fledging postcolonial state.

While the 1960s are often heralded as a radical breaking point with former colonial regimes, in

\textsuperscript{36} See NA, KabSNA, 2.10.41, inv. nr. 553, Annual Report, 17 April 1969 and inv. nr. 1009, Documents Concerning the Handling of a Request to W.A. Patrick, Chair of the Welfare Foundation Sint Eustatius, for Financial Support for the Improvement of Social Circumstances, 1975.
the Antilles, the members of Famia Planea hoped to address the social and economic challenges of the decade together with the Netherlands. Yet, the very conditions that had galvanized more conservative opinions around an ideology of responsible parenthood also shaped more radical imaginaries among the very segment of the population that Famia Planea hoped to target and discipline.

**Sex, Sovereignty and Socialism**

On the 30 May 1969, Willemstad, Curaçao became the scene of a dramatic uprising. After a march through the city demanding fair pay for local laborers at the Shell oil refinery, local police, unable to control the crowd, called on the assistance of the Dutch marines. A labor strike quickly evolved into widespread revolt in downtown Willemstad. While working conditions might have been the problem sparking revolt, the protest revealed a plethora of discontents among the city’s working class and urban poor. The protesters contested the entrenched racial hierarchies on the island that seemed to go hand-in-hand with the ravages of capitalism and foreign ownership of big business. On Curaçao, *Trinta di mei* (Thirtieth of May) is remembered as a moment of awakening—the radical entry of Afro-Curaçaoans into politics, and the dawn of a new public consciousness among Curaçaoans of all walks of life who sought to celebrate rather than suppress the traditions that distinguished the island from the former Dutch metropole.

Historians Gert Oostindie, Luc Alofs and others have examined the paradoxical reverberation of this event across the Kingdom. On Aruba, insular leadership that postured as

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the “real” Arubans—descendants of indigenous Indians and European colonists—mobilized fears of a radical, Afro-Curaçaoan takeover of the federal government to revitalize demands for Aruba’s separation from the Antillean constellation.\(^{38}\) In the Netherlands, too, the decision to send in the marines revived memories of the bloody decolonization wars in Indonesia. Fearful of looking like a neo-colonial overlord on the world stage, the progressive cabinet that came to power in 1973 under Joop den Uyl prioritized the full decolonization of the Antilles and Suriname as a cornerstone of its emancipatory agenda.\(^{39}\) On Curaçao, meanwhile, radical political imaginaries went mainstream—and while the guard did change in 1969, the political machinery did not. Nor, too, did the Caribbean country’s economic plight.

This version of the cause and effect of Trinta di mei is well known to historians of the Antilles. But a neglected part of this history is how reproductive rights and women’s emancipation factored into the run-up to and aftermath of the revolutionary events of 1969. This oversight is striking for two reasons. First, social scientists and statesman on Curaçao tasked with diagnosing and ameliorating the causes of Trinta di mei in its immediate aftermath focused on the revolt’s alleged causes in family structures and “overpopulation.”\(^{40}\) In the concluding recommendations of the report 30 Mei 1969, the government-formed committee prioritized mention of the need for greater access to birth control and family planning before addressing the seemingly more urgent issue of increased representation of Afro-Curaçaoans in Antillean

\(^{38}\) Alofs argues that Trinta di mei galvanized dormant aspirations for Aruban separatism by mobilizing fears of a Black socialist takeover in the Antilles. In 1986, after a long and contentious process of negotiation in The Hague, Aruba achieved its status aparte or separate status within the Kingdom, separating from the Antillean constellation while maintaining bilateral ties with the Netherlands. See Alofs’ entry in ed. Oostindie, *Dromen En Littekens: Dertig Jaar Na De Curadaose Revolte, 30 Mei 1969* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999).

\(^{39}\) Oostindie and Klinkers, *Decolonising the Caribbean*, 69-75.

\(^{40}\) The government-commissioned report on the causes of Trinta di mei calls to mind the Report of West India Royal Commission, also known as the Moyne Report, which appraised the causes of labor unrest throughout the British Caribbean in 1938. This report similarly targeted Afro-Jamaican family structures and the “overpopulation” of the impoverished and working classes. See De Barros, *Reproducing the British Caribbean*, 162-173.
government. While this can no doubt be read as a displacement of blame away from severe structural causes of inequality and onto familiar themes of black sexual irresponsibility, government reports on *Trinta di mei* nevertheless prompt us to consider the centrality of reproductive and family politics to contemporary understandings of the uprising. Second and related, the omission of reproductive politics in studies of *Trinta di mei* is surprising not least because the revolt’s very leaders devoted sustained attention to topics such as birth control, population policy, and women’s rights in their major publication, *Vitó*. In this way, reproductive politics formed a critical part of the leftist, anti-imperial imaginary throughout the 1960s-1980s, when leftist activism moved out of the sphere of labor politics and under the umbrella of radical feminist activism. Perhaps most interesting is that later feminist groups viewed access to birth control, and the expansion of women’s rights—issues that were sometimes, though not always, linked—as imperative to the struggle to secure full and complete independence from the Netherlands.

The first utterances surrounding family planning and birth control in the leading leftist periodicals of *Vitó, Kontakto Antiano* and *Kambio* were similarly linked to fears over a certain kind of overpopulation. Authors of these newspapers, however, did not admonish poor families as Famia Planea did. Rather, leftist authors regarded large and cash-poor families as the dupes of a Catholic and colonial government who did not look out for their best interests. It was a paternalism perhaps of a different kind, and one that served distinct political goals: to break free from the colonial government and to reduce the influence of the Catholic Church. Leftists writing for *Vitó, Kontakto Antiano* and *Kambio* shared these views, views that were no doubt inflected by the authors’ common educational backgrounds and political ideologies. Run largely

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41 UBL, KITLV Collection, 30 Mei 1969, Deel II (Willemstad: 1970), VI, XI.
42 These periodicals circulated primarily in Curaçao and the Netherlands in the 1960s-1970s.
by the generation of young adults whose parents had benefited from the oil boom of the 1940s-50s, the authors of leftist periodicals were almost uniformly educated in the Netherlands. Both *Kontakto Antiano* and *Kambio* were started by Antillean university students in the Netherlands. Their experiences in the metropolitan state of the 1960s-1970s inspired fierce critiques of the lingering Dutch presence in the Caribbean and a strong reproach of colonial racism and capitalism. These journals circulated among other leftist student groups in the Netherlands and across the Atlantic. Alternatively, oil refinery workers on Curaçao began to publish *Vitó* in 1966. This publication—and, in particular, its editor-in-chief Stanley Brown—would go on to play a leading role in the uprising of 1969.

Much attention has been devoted to the ways in which citizens from the former colonies became radicalized during their student period in the metropolitan state. For individuals in the Antillean diaspora in the Netherlands as well, the experience of immigration invigorated feelings of Antillean unity that were often fragile, if not altogether inconceivable, in the Antilles themselves. In the Antillean state-of-six, insular distances and cultural divides between the six islands could prove insurmountable. Publications like *Kambio*, *Kontakto Antiano* and *Vitó* unequivocally supported the future independence of the Antilles-of-six. Not only did the spatial proximity among Antilleans in the Netherlands enable Leeward Islanders and Curaçaoaners, for example, to interact more frequently than they would have in the Antilles. Additionally, their common status as “outsiders” in the Netherlands—this despite their common Dutch citizenship—likewise mobilized greater feelings of unity. As Antillean scholars Willem Koot and Anco Ringeling observed, migration to the Netherlands also mitigated the intense racial

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divides that plagued Antillean societies.\textsuperscript{44} While Antilleans of lighter complexion might be regarded as “white” in the Caribbean, in the Netherlands European Dutch viewed these individuals as people of color. Although certain dividing lines remained acute for Antilleans in the diaspora—including, above all, distinctions between upper-class and cash-poor Antillean Dutch—the common experiences of racism and cultural and linguistic isolation blunted the social distance between Antilleans in the diaspora. Thus, the maxim that “the Netherlands Antilles exists only in the Netherlands”\textsuperscript{45} holds true not only for the Dutch colonists who invented this colonial polity, but also for many Antilleans active within immigrant organizations. Indeed, it was in the Netherlands rather than in the Antilles that many activists came to support a radical politics of Antillean unity and independence.

Antillean student groups in the Netherlands were also likely to have come into contact with radical anti-colonial activists from other parts of the Dutch empire. The founders of \textit{Kontakto Antiano}, for example, attended the very university where, in the 1960s, a group of young Surinamese students re-discovered \textit{Wij Slaven van Suriname} (We Slaves of Suriname) by the anti-colonial critic Anton de Kom.\textsuperscript{46} While little scholarship has explored in depth the period of Antillean immigration to the Netherlands in the 1960s, this was undoubtedly a time of radicalization among the Antillean community both in the Netherlands and in the Antilles. The

\textsuperscript{44} Koot and Ringeling, \textit{De Antillianen}, 139.
\textsuperscript{45} Qtd. In Oostindie, \textit{Paradise Overseas}, 52.
\textsuperscript{46} This text, originally published in 1943 by the Surinamese-Dutch resistance fighter, Anton de Kom, became the rallying cry for Surinamese independence, achieved in 1973. Historian Peter Meel attributes the radicalization of Surinamese college students in the Netherlands in the 1960s with the rediscovery of this text and the proximity to other immigrant groups who fiercely criticized the neo-colonialism of the Dutch state, including, especially, Moluccans who had become increasingly radical and militant in their criticism of Dutch treatment of post-colonial migrants. On Surinamese independence, see Meel, \textit{Tussen Autonomie En Onafhankelijkheid}, and Hoeft and Meel, \textit{Twentieth-Century Suriname: Continuities and Discontinuities in a New World Society} (Kingston: Ian Randle Press, 2001). On Moluccan nationalism, see Fridus Steijlen, \textit{Moluccan Nationalism: History, Split Factions, and New Wounds} (Leiden: Royal Institute of Linguistics and Anthropology, 1999).
emergence of several radical leftist periodicals in the 1960s such as *Kambio*, *Kontakto Antiano* and *Vitó* attest to this trend.

Yet, an analysis of these publications also reveals the extent to which their authors were deeply concerned with and influenced by other struggles for anti-colonial liberation, socialist revolt, and the Black Power movement. The pages of *Kambio* and *Kontakto Antiano* were more often filled with regional news from the Americas, paying special attention to the success of the revolution in Cuba and the Black Power movement in the United States. More still, the migration of other groups to Curaçao—primarily of Afro-Caribbeans from the former British empire—might also have been a source of intellectual exchange and ferment. Notably, the first prime minister of Grenada, Eric Gairy, worked at Curaçao’s oil refinery before entering radical politics in his home country.\(^{47}\) It is therefore wise to conceive of circuits of exchange within the Kingdom rather than simply a unidirectional leftward shift emanating from the Netherlands. After all, the Atlantic world has long been defined by high mobility and cultural exchange. As Paul Gilroy argues, dispersal, journey, and migration—movements central to the lives of many in the Caribbean—have endowed thinkers of the Black Atlantic with a unique standpoint from which to critique and experience modernity.\(^{48}\) For this reason, I view *Kambio*, *Kontakto Antiano* and *Vitó* together in a common frame despite the different locations in which their authors lived. Not only did authors of these periodicals express solidarity with each other, they also shared a similar critique of the Kingdom and worked to ensure the independence of the Antillean state through anti-colonial and anti-capitalist mobilization.


Another similarity running across these periodicals is their persistent attention to intersecting issues of overpopulation, reproductive freedoms and women’s rights. *Kambio*, the earliest leftist-oriented publication started by Antillean students in Leiden, Netherlands in 1965, focused on Curaçao’s overpopulation problem in its two inaugural issues. Its authors claimed:

The overpopulation with which the Antilles must now cope is the direct consequence of the conservative, bigoted politics of the Catholic Church in general and her representatives on the Antilles in particular; but the Antillean government is also not absolved in this as they proved themselves completely...blind when it came time to formulate new insights towards a progressive approach to the overpopulation problem. The results of this shortsightedness did not take long to manifest: the consequences of the lack of every form of birth control have not only resulted in fatal unemployment, but also in the appearance of so-called illegitimate births, which have unfortunately remained too high thanks to this conservative stance of church and state (*overheid*).\(^{49}\)

Thus, prior to the emergence of Famia Planea—which was in part supported by the very institutions this author attacked—leftist authors fit their pleas for progressive population policy into their attacks on Catholicism and local governance, both regarded as the unfortunate holdovers of the colonial past.

When the weekly *Vitó* first appeared on Curaçao in 1966, the newspaper filled an important gap in the regional news scene. *Vitó* was self-published by its editor-in-chief, Stanley Brown, and therefore operated outside of the narrow monopoly on Curaçao that controlled the Antillean press. Brown and other contributors leveraged this freedom to critique entrenched hierarchies of church, state and capital on Curaçao and, to a lesser extent, the other Antillean islands. In one early issue in 1966, the newspaper’s cover displayed various forms of birth control and even included an interview with Dr. Sergio Leon. *Vitó* publicly supported the foundation, but replaced rhetoric on “responsible parenthood” with a critique of lingering

\(^{49}\) IISG, *Kambio*, September 1965 vol. 1, no. 5.
colonial conservatism. Vitó reminded its readers, “Did you know that according to article 240bis of the Criminal Code it is illegal to provide sexual education or contraceptives to persons below the age of 18? Something to ‘add’ to the long list of legal measures waiting to be changed.”

Overpopulation received sustained attention in the run-up to 1969, the year Vitó’s editors joined in the Trinta di mei uprising. For Vitó as for Famia Planea, the issue of overpopulation likewise carried grave social and economic consequences. Lack of job opportunities, the absence of a strong welfare system and the dismal state of insular education were all complaints that stood at the heart of leftist discontent in 1969. In the pages of Vitó both before and after Trinta di mei, these issues became deeply imbricated within concerns about the island’s rising population and fertility rates. In this way, Vitó contended that overpopulation could only in part be addressed by enhancing family planning services. Stemming the threat of overpopulation would, in addition, demand a strong, interventionist government and enlightened social attitudes. The combination of these two would, effectively, prepare the Antillean state and the Antillean population for independence. Thus, an effective approach to overpopulation was in many ways symbolic of the maturation of the Antillean state and people that these leftists thought crucial to securing independence.

In the pursuit of this struggle, contributors to Vitó and Kontakto Antiano insisted that traditional gender roles must change. Women should no longer be relegated to the home or suffer the status of second-class citizens. These leftists, along with later feminist activists in the 1970s-1980s, criticized especially colonial-era laws that forbade married women, or women living in concubine relationships from keeping their jobs in the public sector, and laws that ascribed minor status to married women, prohibiting them from administering or making

50 IISG, Vitó, 1966 vol. 2 no.7, 2.
decisions on household goods and property without the consent of the husband. Moreover, demands for women’s emancipation were made often in explicit connection to reproductive issues. In a 1970 edition of the regularly recurring column entitled, “Open Letter to Women,” Vitó authors insisted that women deserved full legal and economic equality with men, social welfare that offered financial security and educational opportunities to all families, and a “large project to control fertility.” To this end, all young women at the age of 14 should receive sexual education in order to decrease the high birthrate, cited at 3,000 live births annually. The author continued in increasingly forceful tone:

The majority of the 3,000 children born on Curaçao will not be able to be cared for. IT IS IN OUR HANDS TO DRAMATICALLY CHANGE THIS SITUATION. YOU, ME, WE ALL MUST COOPERATE. Vitó will work all week to loudly proclaim our revolution, which will give us back our rights to be human, which will give us back our LIBERTY.

Tying together issues of fundamental human rights and liberty with demands for an interventionist population policy, these activists located reproductive politics at the center of revolutionary imaginaries.

In the aftermath of 1969, the language of revolutionary action increasingly inflected discussion on reproductive politics and gender relations. An article appearing in Vitó in 1970 looked forward to “the day when women do not accept the abuse any more,” and called on women to “REMEMBER EVERY TIME YOU HAVE SEXUAL RELATIONS TO USE CONTRACEPTIVES...REMEMBER NOT TO HAVE SEXUAL RELATIONS WITH A MAN

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51 In the Antillean LAM (legal code regulating public servants), Articles 95 and 96 required women to quit or be fired from public service upon marriage and denied pensions for married female public servants respectively. These laws were both abolished in 1983 after years of feminist agitation. In 1975, with the repeal of a stipulation in the Antillean civil code, married women no longer needed their husband’s consent in disposing of property, changing residences, or signing loans or contracts.

WHO TREATS YOU LIKE A SLAVE.” Both the language and subject matter that these leftists took up far surpassed Famia Planea in its radical demands and progressivism. Surprisingly, both Vitó and Kontakto Antiano touched on a range of issues related to non-marital, non-reproductive sex, including better protection for domestic prostitutes and a precocious defense of gay-identifying Antillean men both in the Netherlands and on Curaçao. In 1969, Vitó featured a lengthy interview with a closeted gay man who discussed in great detail his encounters with discrimination and his feelings of shame and marginalization on Curaçao. Kontakto Antiano, alternatively, reported on a meeting of a small Antillean gay rights group in the Netherlands, who hoped to enhance visibility and tolerance for the gay community there. Whereas Famia Planea sought to avoid public discussion of abortion, Vitó loudly proclaimed its support for decriminalization.

Yet, within this revolutionary language, conservative assumptions about traditional gender roles surfaced. By and large, the overwhelmingly male contributors to Vitó assumed that it was women rather than men who should maintain responsibility for acquiring education on birth control methods and avoiding sexual contact that was either exploitative or reckless. One rare editorial written by a 26-year old single mother of three entitled, "Which one of us is the whore?" attacked male privilege but laid the blame for the unchallenged superiority of men at the feet of Curaçaon women. The author continued, "Little by little I came to realize that on Curaçao, women accept the foolishness of men," and called on other women to reject "living like slaves." Statements like this no doubt blunted the forceful critique of church and state, transferring blame for the inferior status of women from the enduring institutional and social

53 IISG, Vitó, 19 September 1970.
54 IISG, Vitó, 5 April 1969.
55 IISG, Kontakto Antiano, June 1971, vol. 3 no. 3.
legacies of imperialism to women’s acquiescence. To be sure, men were called on within the pages of leftist periodicals to update their presumptions about gender roles and women’s rights. But this injunction, too, appeared in awkward efforts to eroticize black women—and thus to value white and black feminine beauty equally—as well as within claims that men, while not responsible for procuring birth control, should not stand in the way of a woman’s desire to use contraceptives. Ambivalence on women’s roles in this unfolding revolution were perhaps best evidenced by the sustained attention to reproductive issues and women’s rights, on the one hand, the paucity of women’s voices on the other hand.

In what ways did reproductive and sexual politics impact the revolutionary events of *Trinta di mei*? To what extent did Vitó’s Brown and other members of *Frente Obrero Liberashon* (FOL)—the socialist party to which Brown belonged, and who assumed positions of power after 1969—continue to champion reproductive issues once in power? Two years after the revolution, in 1971, the Antillean executive formed a committee to study laws that upheld sex-based discrimination, although it would take at least another decade to abolish many of these discriminatory statutes. Although policies pertaining to women’s subordination would remain in place until the 1980s, the aspirations of Vitó and FOL to change these policies and the social attitudes underpinning them merits scholarly attention. While the majority of scholarship has focused on the achievements and disappointments of *Trinta di mei*, it is striking that none have commented upon the ways in which radical actors attempted to rally support for progressive reproductive and sexual politics, while also retreating from the urgency of these goals once.

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58 As historians Oostindie and Klinkers have argued, despite the entry of some radical players into Antillean politics and the growing representation of Afro-Curaçaoans in federal government and Antillean parliament (as a direct result of 30 May 1969, Ben Leito replaced Ephraim Jonckheer to become the first Black Governor of the Netherlands Antilles), these politicians once in power quickly retreated from revolutionary goals—resulting most notably in the creation of closer bonds of collaboration with the Netherlands and in increased demands for greater contribution of resources and development aid from the Netherlands to the Antilles. This forms a striking departure from the aspirations for independence that helped to touch off the May movement. Oostindie and Klinkers, *Decolonising the Caribbean*, 70-75.
actors associated with Vitó entered the political mainstream.\textsuperscript{59} While this may tell us something about protest leadership’s priorities, it also suggests that perhaps reproductive and sexual freedoms—tethered to a range of assumptions about appropriate gender roles and fears of overpopulation—may have indeed played a role in mobilizing support for the uprising in 1969 and for the entry of its leadership into politics that year.

While commitments to reproductive rights and gender equality conveniently disappeared from the political agenda in 1969, \textit{Trinta di mei} did impact subsequent leftist social movements in notable ways. As the former revolutionaries of 1969 joined the political mainstream in the decades following the revolt, leftist actors on both sides of the Atlantic continued to press for full and immediate independence from the Netherlands. Student groups like \textit{Kontakto Antiano}, formed just prior to May 1969, continued to publish on global anti-capitalism and anti-colonialism into the early 1980s, nearly a full decade after Vitó seized to exist. More still, the uprising served as a turning point that inspired a later generation of leftist-feminists.\textsuperscript{60} On Curaçao, a new group of radical feminist activists entered the fray, powerfully co-opting the struggle for Antillean independence from a largely male-dominated discursive and political space. In 1975, the first International Year of the Woman, the Antilles first feminist group, Unity for Antillean Women (\textit{Union Muhé Antiano}, hereafter UMA), formed on Curaçao.\textsuperscript{61} These actors combined women’s rights, demands for independence, and reproductive freedoms with greater consistency. In contrast to an earlier generation of leftist activists, these feminists focused much greater attention on how lingering colonial oppression and capitalist exploitation

\textsuperscript{59} Curaçaoan scholar Jeanne Henriquez, however, does note Vitó’s intermittent support for women’s rights, a theme she attributes to the participation of Amy Henriquez in the Vitó movement. However, authorship of Vitó articles is difficult to determine given that the publication rarely provided an author’s name or the names of its editorial board, apart from its editor-in-chief, Stanley Brown. Jeanne D. Henriquez and Lucille Berry-Haseth, \textit{Kúrsou Su Muhénan Pionero} (Willemstad: Archivo Nashonal di Antia Hulandes, 2002).

\textsuperscript{60} Interview with Gladys do Rego, founder of UMA, Willemstad, Curaçao, 29 July 2016.

\textsuperscript{61} The group’s founding is discussed in an article by one of its former members. See Cuales, “In Search of Our Memory.”
rendered women uniquely vulnerable. Because of this, they saw the struggle for women’s emancipation as inseparable from the struggle for Antillean independence.

One editorial running in both Kontakto Antiano and re-printed in the conservative mainstream newspaper Amigoe in 1971 and 1972 respectively called on women to “Use your common sense!” Although the female author pointed out that women bore some responsibility for rejecting their mistreatment by Antillean men, her primary contention was that women as well as men needed to be educated not only on reproductive matters, but on the importance of female pleasure. The author stated, “people must also tell [women] that they have just as much right to sexuality as Antillean men and that sexuality is one of the few pleasures in life, for both rich and poor, so long as they ensure that others do not become the dupes because of it.” She argued that sex education should be available to children from a young age, lest a new generation of Antillean women would become “sexual robots.” “It is high time,” the author argued, “that the Antillean woman realize that the great struggle for INDEPENDENCE, mental and sexual, will for an important part take place in the bedroom.” Although she touched on similar themes as other leftists who supported birth control, including the urgent need to expand sex education, legalize abortion, and broaden economic and educational opportunities for youngsters on Curaçao, her editorial is unique among leftist publications for its frank discussion of sexual pleasure both in and of itself, and as a critical step toward achieving the mental and material liberation of Antillean women. She closed her article with an inspirational cry for women to embrace sexual pleasure and reject oppression: “Sexuality, Yes! Slavery, No!”62

The transformation from reproductive rights as an issue of overpopulation to a factor in women’s emancipation would further advance in 1975 with the creation of the Union di Muhé

Antiano (UMA), or Unity for Antillean Women. UMA similarly viewed political independence for the Antilles as constitutive of the struggle for women’s emancipation. The two goals were, indeed, fundamentally linked and inseparable in UMA’s activism, which managed to secure male support for emphasizing the struggle not against Antillean men but with them in pursuit of common aspirations for total decolonization. UMA shared the conviction with early leftists circles on the island that anti-capitalism and anti-colonialism must go hand-in-hand, and that these systems explained the enduring oppression of women, not male attitudes.

UMA’s purpose was, “to stimulate the active participation of women in the struggle for a Free Antilles.” As such, it was not an organization designed primarily to expand reproductive rights for women—and in this way it differs significantly from some of the other ‘gender and sexual revolutions’ taking place in the 1960s and arguably even today, where the defense of women’s reproductive freedom is a primary motivating goal. Although UMA might not have mobilized primarily around this goal, they did speak at length about reproductive issues. Together with the Department of Public Health, they organized a major international seminar on women’s health and sexuality in 1986. UMA frequently held information seminars in neighborhoods through Curaçao, and routinely published on effective use of contraceptives in their publication, Bosero. When UMA discussed birth control and family planning, they did so without the kind of moralizing dictates that characterized earlier discussion of reproductive issues.

63 In the 1970s-1980s, influential Black feminists such as Angela Davis and Audre Lorde rebutted the dominant assumptions of second-wave feminism, with its overwhelming focus on freedom from family. Davis and others claimed that owing to the long history of coercive regulation of Black women’s bodies and families, freedom to form families diverged with the normative assumptions of second-wave feminism. UMA’s approach to reproductive issues reflects similar concerns, informing women of their options without claiming one form of household organization superior to another. Yet, as UMA founder Gladys do Rego-Kuster maintained in an interview, their struggles were also distinct from the Black feminist movements of the United States. Do Rego-Kuster claimed that the tripartite oppression of Antillean women: as women, women of color, and women under a colonial regime, rendered their projects different. Interview with Gladys do Rego, Willemstad, Curaçao, 29 July 2016.
On the occasion of the International Year of the Woman in 1975, various women’s groups on the island—the majority of them social, sometimes loosely based around religious communities—joined together under the umbrella organization, the Steering Committee Curaçao. UMA took on an important role in the Steering Committee, and successfully brought together other groups to agitate for the repeal of laws that disenfranchised married women, reducing them to “legal minors” in 1975 and to abolish laws forbidding married or partnered women from working in the public sector in 1983. In their grassroots outreach activities, UMA routinely discussed information on family planning and fought for the expansion not simply of reproductive freedoms, but for the improvement of living conditions for single Antillean mothers and their children, including access to affordable housing, day care and health care.

While UMA’s activism reached far beyond struggles for reproductive freedoms for women, a thread runs through these varied discussions on reproductive politics, even as the “purpose” of reproductive rights changed over time and across groups. In the early 1960s and even for some leftist thinkers, the primary goal of birth control was to stem overpopulation and diminish stress on limited resources. By the 1970s, and with the entry of UMA into public discourse, reproductive rights were still very much tied to issues of national import—but this time indirectly. For UMA, reproductive health was but one goal within a broader project of women’s emancipation, a goal that ultimately worked to support the ideal of a liberated Antillean state. So, in short, with feminist activism in the 1970s, reproductive rights became women’s rights, but women’s rights became fundamental to the project of Antillean independence.

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65 Their activism resulted in 1978 in the creation of Fundashon Kas Popular, an extra-political organization that distributes public housing. Previously, public housing could be distributed at the will of governing administrators, who often discriminated against single mothers by requesting a guarantor to co-sign. After 1978, applicants to Curaçao’s public housing did not need a guarantor. See Nationaal Archief Curaçao (hereafter NAC), Archief van Union Muhé Antiano (hereafter UMA), inv. nr. 210 box 5, Kasu Ser Fortuna.
Aid and Anxiety: European Dutch Perspectives on Family Planning

As this chapter has demonstrated, reproductive politics on Curaçao factored into demands for greater cooperation with and autonomy from the Netherlands. But this debate occurred not only in the Antilles or among Antillean Dutch residing in the Netherlands. Moving now to the European part of the Kingdom, I will briefly explore how European Dutch policy makers viewed the promises and challenges of a commonwealth Kingdom through the lens of reproductive politics. Dutch thought on reproductive politics also evolved in step with expectations for later Antillean independence, but the evolution of the Netherlands’ approach was neither straightforward nor linear.

Initially, prior to 1970, Famia Planea covered its operating costs through a range of sources: the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) provided monetary and practical assistance, while the Dutch government, under the auspices of the Long Term Development Plan for the Netherlands Antilles, furnished the majority of the foundation’s operating costs. In 1968, the Dutch government extended $197,000 NaF to support Famia Planea’s efforts. Yet, in 1970, the Dutch government abruptly announced that they would taper off funding for Famia Planea over the next four years. This dramatic and unexpected decision imperiled the survival of the foundation, and mobilized a small army of its supporters to petition the Dutch government to reconsider its decision. Dutch officials offered little explanation, saying only that the Antillean government must invest more in Famia Planea if population control were, in fact, an issue of such vital importance to the country’s future. But a look in the archives reveals other considerations, too. One report circulating within the ministry responsible for Antillean affairs is especially revelatory. The report stated, “the rising tide of nationalism in most developing countries makes external advice increasingly less welcome on all issues and
especially so on such sensitive matters as population policies." The word “sensitive” was underlined in thick, red marker. Despite the fact that Famia Planea sought closer bonds of cooperation with the Dutch government, the Dutch government chose instead to distance itself from such “sensitive” matters, their anxieties no doubt heightened after 1969. Indeed, funding was cut at the start of the fiscal year immediately following.

This approach was highly paradoxical and ultimately shortsighted. Professor A.A. Haspels, a European Dutch expert who was involved in the pioneering research on emergency contraception, visited the Netherlands Antilles in 1970 at the request of the Dutch government. In his report, Haspels called for the “energetic support” of Famia Planea by the Dutch government and stated, “Based on the report of the Research Committee…that occurred on 30 May 1969 on Curaçao, I make the following recommendations: In the future, a well thought-out population policy will be necessary for the Netherlands Antilles. Along with vital support for the existing initiatives on the terrain of family planning, measures will need to be adopted for planned emigration.” Curiously, the Dutch government made their support for Famia Planea contingent upon the outcome of this report, and yet ultimately decided to ignore both of the author’s recommendations. It is unlikely that the reasons for this were purely economic—the government continued to invest large amounts of money in other development projects. The retraction of funding for Famia Planea in 1970 signifies not that the Dutch government did not care about these issues. Rather, it suggests in fact that they did. In their effort to wipe clean the legacy of colonial rule, Dutch policy makers acted quickly to distance themselves from issues related to reproduction and population policy. The urgency with which they abandoned projects

66 NA, KabSNA, inv. nr. 2.10.41, 553 "Constraints on Foreign Aid to National Family Planning Programs" by Mr. Wahren (SIDA), Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 26 July 1971.
67 NA, KabSNA, inv. nr. 2.10.41, 553 Report of a Visit to the Netherlands Antilles and Suriname, 4-12 September 1970, by Prof. dr. A.A. Hapsels (Amsterdam: KIT, 1970).
to limit fertility suggests that these were important nodes upon which colonial rule operated, and hence sites upon which the legacies of colonial rule must be dissolved.

Dutch aspirations for Antillean independence, however, did not come to pass in the way many politicians and anti-colonial activists envisioned. The deterioration of the Antillean economy throughout the 1970s-1980s spurred many Antilleans to seek a better life in the Netherlands. The anxieties that animated family planning efforts on Curaçao in the 1960s—that there would not be enough jobs or social services to provide for the population—shifted to the Netherlands, which, in the 1970s, was in the throes of its own economic crisis. The drama that unfolded in the realm of reproductive politics with increased immigration from the Antilles to the Netherlands is the subject of the next chapter.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has examined how reproductive politics served as a proxy discussion for national imaginaries in the Kingdom of the Netherlands. In the 1960s, as doctors and officials expounded upon the threat of overpopulation, they marshaled the discourse of “responsibility” to encourage family planning. This discourse of responsibility gained traction in the 1960s and among groups as diverse as union leaders and Catholic clergy because it sought, in some ways, to reverse the stigma of immaturity and sexual irresponsibility that had underpinned European justifications for colonialism. Instead of rejecting these metrics of “responsibility” as the illegitimate holdovers of corrupt colonial rule, Famia Planea pursued what we might call a mission to “make the Antilles respectable.” As the scholars Harvey Neptune and M. Jacqui Alexander have shown, many newly independent Caribbean nation-states also introduced
legislation and incentives to promote the nuclear family after decolonization. The nuclear family gained critical purchase after decolonization not least because colonial-era stereotypes of racial difference and wanton sexuality justified the unfreedom and dependence of Afro-Caribbeans. Thus, claiming and asserting the nation’s respectability in the realm of the household would demonstrate their preparedness to belong to the modern, postcolonial order. Although the Antilles pursued autonomy rather than independence in the age of decolonization, it is clear that similar concerns about respectability and responsibility, saturated as they were by interlinked assumptions about race and sexuality, emerged in the pursuit of forging closer trans-Atlantic ties.

In the material from Famia Planea, we can see how colonial-era stereotypes possess long and ambivalent afterlives: on the one hand, helping to facilitate perhaps admirable awareness of birth control and family planning, on the other rendering “irresponsible” those families who differed from the norm. The potency of colonialism emerges again in the leftist imaginaries of the 1960s and 1970s. For the anti-colonial activists in the era of Trinta di Mei, reproductive freedoms were at once a way to criticize governing and church authorities who, leftists argued, kept the masses in blind servitude. It was also in part a way to envision a new Antillean government. If the government could manage the island’s population question, then it would also possess the same resources for caring for a more autonomous state, free from colonial and capitalist oppression. According to both Famia Planea and leftists like the authors of Vitó, women should limit their fertility in defense of public order. It was not until the 1970s, with a new generation of feminist activists both inspired and disillusioned by the first-wave of radicalism, who came to appropriate the discussion of reproductive rights as women’s rights.

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68 Neptune, Caliban and the Yankees, and Alexander, Pedagogies of Crossing.
And in doing so, they also fundamentally changed the nature of the struggle for independence—this struggle would be led alongside men, but it would also in large measure be led by and for women. The abrupt and immediate retreat of Dutch development programs supporting family planning efforts speaks as well to the profound imbrication of reproductive politics in the vectors of power and exchange linking the Netherlands and the Caribbean.

In the postcolonial period, we are tempted to think that these explicit articulations of “who can do what and with whom” are comfortably behind us. Feminist scholars in the Caribbean, however, have shown us that such proscriptions are not a thing of the past. Colonial powers left behind restrictive laws that have been re-worked in modern Caribbean nation-states. But these legacies of colonial rule, so visible in their continuity, fail to capture the complexity of the postcolonial relationship, especially in areas that straddle the line between nation-state and dependency. Many actors discussed in this chapter encountered similar difficulties in thinking beyond the logic of the nation-state. For radical activists on Curaçao, independence required a kind of disciplining of selves and the state—women and men were called on to “use their senses” in the realm of birth control and the state would, in turn, provide for them. This dual development would pave the way for independence and ensure the emancipation of Antilleans.

Yet one wonders whether national independence would have brought the kinds of emancipation desired; is the nation-state really the only way to be free? The European Dutch experience is instructive. As this chapter briefly explores and as the following chapter will engage more in depth, the logic of national independence and sovereignty has more often than not rationalized the jealous guarding of state resources, limiting development aid and social welfare in the Kingdom’s Caribbean territories. It was thus Famia Planea who seemed most

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willing to think within the framework of a commonwealth state and to see reproductive issues as ones that permeated the entire Kingdom. Yet, their aspirations were based on universalizing assumptions about the nuclear family and intertwined with racialized understandings of decency and responsibility. When Famia Planea reached out to their commonwealth partner for help, they were met with both condescension and apprehension. The Dutch backed away from that project both to obscure their own imperial image and to prove a point that the Antilles would need to mature politically and sexually if they wanted a seat at the table of independent nations. Thus, to borrow a phrase from gender historian Joan Scott, it would seem these actors had only paradoxes to offer.70

As Didier and Éric Fassin have argued about contemporary France, the ambiguities of racial and sexual questions are not “obfuscations of reality nor obstacles of our understanding of them. Rather, that ambiguity faithfully registers the social reality with which people grapple and in which they live.”71 In this way, attention to the messiness of reproductive politics in the Kingdom offers one way for exploring the social experience of the Kingdom’s postcolonial history. In this instance, reproductive politics formed a trans-Atlantic circuit of exchange with material and social consequences on both side of the Atlantic. In the Antilles, reproductive politics inspired varied political imaginaries, and Kingdom ties inflected not only the tenor of activism but also subjects as intimate as sex education and medical care. As some actors suggested in the 1970s, it was in that highly charged field of the bedroom that Antillean Dutch contested and grappled with what it meant to live in the Kingdom of the Netherlands and to overcome the legacies of colonialism. And so it is no accident that the denunciation of slavery and the celebration of female sexuality came together as a rallying cry in the 1970s. “Sexuality,

Yes! Slavery, No!” is not hyperbole or oversimplification: it is a perceptive statement about the ways in which power and intimacy are profoundly linked in the Kingdom.
Early in the 1970s, Dutch civil servants began to examine the prevalence of single motherhood among recently arrived Antillean migrants.\(^1\) For many actors in the Dutch welfare state, the migration of poor, unmarried Antillean women and their children—a migration that accelerated over the following decades—brought with it a unique and complex set of demands. Antillean and Surinamese Dutch, another group that migrated en masse to the former metropole in the 1970s, entered the Netherlands as full and undifferentiated Dutch citizens with unfettered access to the Dutch welfare state. According to many civil servants, it was this right to welfare that helped to explain the unprecedented migration from the 1970s on that followed deepening economic crisis in the islands. Yet, for some, the problems faced by single mothers could not simply be resolved by marshaling the resources of the welfare state. Bureaucrats felt they needed enhanced knowledge of the lives of Antillean families, and called on academic researchers to develop expertise on the Caribbean household. Antillean groups in the Netherlands bristled at the government’s narrow focus on some of its most vulnerable members. Leaders of these organizations also saw the struggles of single mothers as evidence of failure of the Dutch welfare state to emancipate the Antillean community.

As this chapter will explore, migration from the Caribbean parts of the Kingdom tested the

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\(^1\) A note on terminology: in this chapter I use “Caribbean migrants” to refer to Dutch citizens of Surinamese and Antillean origin. I use “Antillean” or “Antillean Dutch” to refer to persons born on one of the six Antillean islands. During the period under study, in 1986, Aruba became an autonomously governing member state of the Kingdom, and thereafter the term “Antillean” did not include people born on Aruba. However, in view of the fact that the Netherlands Antilles no longer exists and in the interest of clarity (at the expense of some accuracy), I have chosen to use “Antillean Dutch” to refer to all persons originating from one of the six former Netherlands Antillean islands. The politics of naming are always complicated, and no less so in this case, because though I make distinction in this chapter between European Dutch (that is, Dutch citizens of European origin) and Antileans and Surinamese, for the majority of the period in which this chapter covers, these groups possessed common citizenship.
evolving structures of the Dutch welfare state in the 1970s-90s, a period that witnessed not only unprecedented migration to the Netherlands but also uncertainty about the future of Kingdom-ties. Scholars have generally approached this period in Dutch history from two perspectives. The first examines the nature of immigration policy in the Netherlands, and assesses whether or not immigrant groups from postcolonial states and a growing number of contract laborers and their families from Turkey and Morocco were encouraged to maintain separate group and ethnic identities from those of European Dutch. One of the questions driving this group of scholars is whether and to what extent immigrants to the Netherlands were encouraged to assimilate into mainstream Dutch society. The second and related trend in the literature explores the often-acrimonious debates on Dutch citizenship and belonging unleashed by this immigration, and links the revival of nationalist discourses in the contemporary Netherlands to the reluctant transformation of the country in the 1970s into an immigrant country. This literature focuses overwhelmingly on how mainstream Dutch society came to embrace gay rights and women’s rights as fundamental to its national identity, in contrast to the alleged conservatism of primarily Muslim immigrants in the Netherlands.


scholarship by considering the consolidation of notions of difference among Antillean and European Dutch in the era of mass migration, and focuses in particular on how difference concretized along the axes of gender, sexuality and race. However, this chapter departs from the existing literature by highlighting the social, political and intellectual processes by which Antillean and European Dutch were rendered distinct in the 1970s-1990s—a process, I argue, that required intensive investment that resonated above all in the Dutch welfare state and in the remarkable interest in the alleged eccentricities of the Antillean household. The explosion of research by European Dutch civil servants and academics linking Antillean household composition to welfare reliance was at once of an intimate and interventionist order. Although the tone of this research shifted in the period under study, first from a desire to integrate Antillean mothers into European Dutch society and reduce welfare dependence in the 1970s to a concern with preventing the migration of poor single mothers and their children from the mid-1980s-90s, the focus on single motherhood and household composition remained constant. Indeed, while the Netherlands Antilles had once stood at the periphery of public interest, by the 1970s the intimate behaviors of those living at the margins of the former Dutch empire became a topic of sustained intellectual investment.

This investment had an ambivalent impact: on the one hand helping to produce problematic stereotypes of “welfare moms” and solidifying notions of difference between

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4 Jordanna Bailkin analyzes the parallel developments of decolonization and the creation of the postwar welfare state in The Afterlife of Empire.
European and Antillean Dutch, and on the other hand opening paths to discuss what an
egalitarian Kingdom of the Netherlands would look like. In this chapter, I view welfare as a
contested material and discursive field, and analyze how a growing number of Antillean Dutch in
the Netherlands made claims for equality within and against the Dutch welfare state.

The efflorescence of knowledge production at empire’s end also reads against the grain of
histories of colonial knowledge. Historians and anthropologists of imperialism have long
maintained that the development of expertise and the accrual of knowledge of colonized cultures
helped to maintain and advance colonial rule. Comparatively less attention has been devoted,
however, to the ways in which the demands of decolonization and immigration—deeply
entwined phenomena in the case of the Kingdom of the Netherlands—made urgent new kinds of
knowledge production. As historian Jordanna Bailkin has written on postcolonial Britain, “the
metropole, too, functioned as a live site of knowledge production about imperial decline.”

Following Bailkin’s challenge to think together the histories of decolonization and the
development of the welfare state, this chapter also demonstrates how the Dutch welfare state
responded to an emerging cadre of experts who linked welfare reliance among Antilleans to
household organization and conjugal norms. In the period under study, the provisions of the
welfare state fluctuated as a result of the recommendations made by social scientists and based

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on predictions about future Antillean sovereignty. Although the 1970s witnessed the flourishing of social welfare, by the 1990s and with the realization that the Antilles would not become independent, the social safety net shrunk in light of research highlighting its “abuse” by Antillean immigrants.

This chapter moves thematically and chronologically across discussions of welfare from three perspectives. After a brief survey of the history of Caribbean migration to the Netherlands, I consider how municipal and later state authorities addressed the influx of Caribbean migration in Dutch municipalities, and the areas of policy deemed particularly urgent for accommodating Surinamese and Antilleans in the Netherlands. Next I consider how topics deemed important for policy—family size, single parenthood, and methods of birth control—later became the subject of numerous government-funded scientific studies. These studies, which were intended to inform welfare policy and providers, variously justified both increased intervention in Antillean family life and, by the 1990s, significant reductions in social benefits for all Dutch citizens. Lastly, I look at how Antillean welfare organizations in the Netherlands—which proliferated in the 1970s-80s as a result of active municipal and federal support—participated in discussions about welfare, paying special attention to how their priorities both coincided with and diverged from Dutch policy makers. In particular, I examine how certain organizations attempted to fashion welfare work as an essential tool in the struggle against enduring colonial oppression and racism—a tool with the potential to radically transform the Kingdom of the Netherlands. As I will argue throughout, the ambivalent nature of this investment, at once concerned and coercive, evinces a process of growing entanglement between the European Netherlands and its Antillean partners in the postcolonial period. It was not only the experience of migration that established stronger vectors of exchange between the Netherlands and the Caribbean. It was likewise in the
realm of welfare that claims for assimilation, separation, and emancipation were made on both sides of the Kingdom.

Making the “Seventh Island”: Antillean Immigration to the Netherlands

A number of factors changed the character of Antillean immigration to the Netherlands throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, prior to which only a small number of students immigrated to the Netherlands each year. First, widespread mechanization in the Shell and Esso oil refineries on Curaçao and Aruba led to increased unemployment and created an available labor force that could be partially absorbed by the Netherlands, which faced a severe shortage in skilled manual labor in the decades immediately following the war. This initial wave of Antillean immigration in the early 1960s was thus encouraged by Dutch companies and hospitals, who recruited male laborers and female nurses and healthcare workers respectively. It was not until the early 1970s, however, that immigration from the Antilles increased significantly and the socio-economic profile of Antillean immigration changed. Ever worsening economic conditions in the Antilles, where the onset of the global economic crisis exacerbated already high levels of unemployment, led to yet a second wave of immigration to the Netherlands in the 1970s.

This time, however, the Netherlands neither encouraged nor expected increased migration from the Netherlands Antilles. Deindustrialization and the effects of the oil crisis gripped Europe, too, and immigration from the Netherlands Antilles, other parts of Europe, Turkey and Morocco was now perceived by many within Dutch government as a burden on a narrowing social safety net and shrinking economy.\(^7\) It was also in this time period that the character of

Antillean immigration changed substantially: whereas the male and female immigrants in the 1960s tended to be skilled and educated laborers, the 1970s saw the rise in migration of families from the lowest classes of Antillean society. The increase in the migration of families brought with it a concomitant increase in female migrants, who, after 1973, outnumbered their male counterparts.8

While this chapter focuses largely on discussions around and activism among Antillean immigrants, it is important to note that immigration from the Antilles was not the only significant development of the 1970s. Indeed, yet another cause of increased Caribbean migration, albeit more difficult to quantify, was the uncertain future over the political status of the Caribbean territories within the Kingdom. When the independence of Suriname was announced in 1973, roughly one-half of that country’s population left to claim citizenship in the Netherlands before the final transfer of sovereignty occurred on 25 November 1975. Out of anxiety for an uncertain future in their own country, many Antilleans followed suit. In a curious reversal of behavior for a former colonial power who, at least in Indonesia, clung desperately and unsuccessfully to imperial rule, the Dutch cabinet under progressive Prime Minister Joop den Uyl sought to rouse rather than suppress the zeitgeist of independence in the Caribbean parts of the Kingdom. Thus, it was not so much the homegrown demand for independence that prompted first Surinamese and later Antilleans to leave en masse for the Netherlands in the 1970s.9 Rather, in the Netherlands Antilles, it was out of a sense of anxiety that other factors might lead the six-island state toward an uncertain political future—fears that grew as the post-independence situation in Suriname

9 As evidenced by the veritable exodus from Suriname to the Netherlands in the 1970s, the issue of independence was never put to a popular referendum and was rather spearheaded by the Nationale Partij Suriname (NPS) in concert with the Dutch government, see Hoefte and Meel, Twentieth-Century Suriname and Meel, Tussen Autonomie en Onafhankelijkheid.
deteriorated, by 1980, into military dictatorship.

Although the postcolonial trajectories of Suriname and the Netherlands Antilles differed in large measure—to say nothing of the extraordinary differences within and amongst these two Caribbean societies prior to decolonization—municipal and federal authorities in the Netherlands perceived the cultures of and challenges faced by Antilleans and Surinamese as similar enough to warrant coordinated policy and research. At least throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, nearly all policy and research concerned Surinamese and Antilleans alike. Although the sudden and unexpected arrival of over 120,000 Surinamese Dutch in the Netherlands captivated public interest more than the comparatively smaller migration of 25,000 Antilleans to the Netherlands in the 1970s, Antillean immigration was not simply ignored—rather, it was collapsed into discussion of Surinamese immigration. Indeed, as the following section shows, civil servants scrambling to address the exigencies of increased migration often regarded Antilleans and Surinamese as part of a common and undifferentiated people, eliding the differences both between and within these two extremely heterogeneous groups.

Large Families, Single Mothers: Municipal Welfare Policy in the 1970s

The vast majority of immigrants arriving from the Dutch Caribbean in the 1970s settled in the four major urban centers of the Netherlands: Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht.10 As Dutch citizens, Surinamese and Antilleans could settle freely in the Netherlands, although upon arrival they often encountered difficulties with housing, employment or locating educational opportunities—difficulties compounded by the economic crisis in the Netherlands

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10 Amsterdam drew the largest number of immigrants from the Netherlands Antilles and Suriname. For an exemplary ethnography of the Surinamese community in Amsterdam Zuid-Oost, see Markus Balkenhol, "Tracing Slavery: An Ethnography of Diaspora, Affect, and Cultural Heritage in Amsterdam" (Ph.D. diss., Vrije Universiteit, 2014).
and exacerbated by racist discrimination in the housing and job market. Although the national government tried to coordinate the settlement of Surinamese and Antilleans after 1974, the practicalities of finding suitable housing ultimately fell on the shoulders of municipal governments, which also assumed responsibility for providing welfare services and social assistance to qualifying residents.

In Amsterdam, the city with the largest population of Kingdom partners (Rijksgenoten), the aging urban center and virtual monopoly of private corporations in the housing market rendered the housing crisis uniquely acute. Many migrants languished in overcrowded hotels intended for temporary residence. Right away, city residents and civil servants identified the sizes and composition of migrant families as problematic. The owner of one hotel stated, “Due to the large

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11 On discrimination uncovered in Amsterdam and Rotterdam’s public housing sector, including the refusal to settle migrants in certain neighborhoods, see Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid and Penninx, Ethnic Minorities, 76. I have found evidence of this in NA, Landelijke Stichting Welzijn voor Antillianen, 2.19.018 invr. nr. 46, Knelpunten in welzijnsbehartiging Surinamers en Antillianen Rotterdam, 28 January 1972; and Gemeentelijk Stadsarchief Amsterdam (hereafter GSA), Archief van de Sociale Dienst 30047, invr. nr. 845, Documents related to the welfare of immigrants from Suriname and the Netherlands Antilles, 1977-1983.

12 In June of 1974, the Ministry of Culture, Recreation and Social Work (Cultuur, Recreatie en Maatschappelijk Werk, CRM) established the Inter-ministerial Committee for Policy Coordination with Respect to Citizens of Migrants from Suriname and the Netherlands Antilles (ICBM). Their task was to coordinate ministerial activities in the identification and resolution of problems in housing, employment and social affairs. An additional task of the ICBM was also to submit proposals concerning the remigration of citizens of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, thereby promoting the development of Suriname and the Netherlands Antilles. See Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid and Penninx, Ethnic Minorities, 64-65.


14 The provision of social assistance was the most important task of municipal Social Services departments. Qualifying residents could received social assistance payments through the National Assistance Act (Algemene Bijstandswet, hereafter A.B.W.), which provided a minimum level of financial subsistence to all persons residing legally in the Netherlands with inadequate financial resources to meet their living costs. According to internal reports, the vast majority of welfare clients of Caribbean origin received social assistance through the A.B.W. Established in 1965, this measure critically expanded the social safety net and rendered the national government primarily responsible for the provision of social assistance, which had been previously coordinated by religious and other charitable organizations. Until 1996, the A.B.W. provided benefits to parents who were the sole providers of their children, until those children reached the age of 12 or 16. Those who did not qualify for assistance through the A.B.W. could qualify for assistance through the municipality according to the Unemployment Act (Wet Werkloosheidsvoorziening, hereafter W.W.V.), which provided a temporary minimum income to those fit for and actively seeking employment. Subsidized housing was not solely the responsibility of municipal departments. Rather, the distribution of subsidized housing relied on cooperation between the Municipal Relocation Services (Gemeentelijke Dienst Herhuisvesting), private housing corporations, and private home and property owners.
number of children on the property in question, whose parents are apparently not aware of the habits in Dutch and Western European society, the Miereveldstraat is becoming a 24-hour playground and place for mischievous behavior.” It was no wonder the children were so disorderly, she claimed, since, “one seldom sees their fathers.”

Popular concerns about cultural differences inflected the policy of settlement. The first major priority of local governments was to re-settle Surinamese and Antillean immigrants according to a policy of “dispersed settlement.” Dispersal of thousands of immigrants seeking housing, however, required national cooperation. In June of 1974, the Ministry CRM established the Inter-ministerial Committee for Policy Coordination with Respect to Citizens of Migrants from Suriname and the Netherlands Antilles (ICBM). Their task was to coordinate ministerial activities in the identification and resolution of problems in housing, employment and social affairs. An additional task of the ICBM was also to submit proposals concerning the remigration of citizens of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, thereby promoting the development of Suriname and the Netherlands Antilles. Even under new inter-ministerial supervision, problems in providing for and coordinating the settlement of Surinamese and Antilleans in the Netherlands abounded. The policy of “degrouped concentration” or “dispersed settlement,” as civil servants variously titled it, was designed to relieve pressure on the major cities in the western Netherlands. No policy of enforcement, however, attended these ambitions. Even after the so-called “5% regulation” went into effect, which mandated that five percent of all housing constructed with government subsidies must be reserved for citizens from the Kingdom territories, private housing corporations in both Amsterdam and Rotterdam—with the implicit

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15 GSA, Archief van de Sociale Dienst 30047, invr. nr. 837, Letter to mayor and city council of Amsterdam regarding the situation in hotels, July 1977.
16 Prior to Surinamese independence in 1975, this committee was briefly titled, “Inter-ministerial Committee for Policy Coordination with respect to Citizens of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.”
17 Regeringsbeleid Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid and Penninx, Ethnic Minorities, 64-65.
knowledge of local governments—denied Surinamese and Antilleans housing in certain neighborhoods.\textsuperscript{18}

As a result of this initially lethargic coordination, at times blatantly racist discrimination in the housing market, and legitimate housing shortages in the major cities—where immigrants nevertheless predominantly settled—the majority of Surinamese and Antilleans settled in dangerously outdated buildings in urban centers or else in isolated suburbs lacking infrastructure, of which the Bijlmermeer in Amsterdam South-East is the most notable example.\textsuperscript{19} Many others awaited offers of private subsidized housing from fire-hazardous boarding houses (\textit{pensions}).\textsuperscript{20} By 1975, the major arm of the ICBM that coordinated settlement policy had little to boast about: three times more immigrants had applied for subsidized housing than anticipated. Only 2,000 had been settled so far while 13,500 more awaited an offer of permanent housing. Ninety-four reception centers accommodated some 7,500 people and 15,000 applications awaited consideration. In their policy objectives for 1976, the ICBM urged, “the host society should acquire insight into the immigrants’ lifestyle and background. Municipal bodies and local organizations coming into contact with what is for them an unfamiliar group need to be informed on the subject.”\textsuperscript{21}

In fact, at the start of the 1970s civil servants had begun to elaborate on the ways in which “very large families” and single mothers stressed some of the most important provisions of the


\textsuperscript{19} Initially built as a modernist haven for the white middle-class, the Bijlmer project failed to attract its intended demographic and, from the 1960s until the early 1970s, its characteristic highrise apartment buildings—a major departure from traditional Dutch building styles—sat largely empty and its infrastructure largely underdeveloped. Owed in part to the availability of space, a rarity in Amsterdam, many Surinamese and Antillean immigrants came to live in the Bijlmermeer in the 1970s. Yet, as Markus Balkenhol contends, planning and policy makers may also have favored this location because it concentrated lower-class people of color outside of the Amsterdam city center and other suburbs. See especially Chapter Two in Balkenhol, "Tracing Slavery."

\textsuperscript{20} Multiple references in GAS, Archief van de Sociale Dienst 30047 invr. nrs. 837 & 845. In several dramatic instances covered in the press, these guesthouses burned down and killed several residents.

\textsuperscript{21} Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid and Penninx, \textit{Ethnic Minorities.}, qtd. on pp. 66.
welfare state.\textsuperscript{22} Records from the archive of Amsterdam’s Department of Social Services reveal two recurring preoccupations for municipal welfare providers: the prevalence of “single mothers” (alleenstaande moeders) and the number of Surinamese and Antillean families with four or more children, which civil servants categorized as “very large families” (“zeer grote gezinnen”). According to welfare providers, these seemingly commonplace patterns of family life among Caribbean immigrants stressed the housing market, already overcrowded and ill-equipped to accommodate families needing more than two bedrooms, and funds for social assistance, traditionally viewed as a means of temporary subsistence. Also among the immediate problems confronting municipal administrations, however, was the lack of concrete statistics about immigrants and their living situations given that they entered the Dutch welfare system no differently than other European Dutch citizens.

An early confidential report issued by Amsterdam’s department of social services in 1972 established these and other topics as areas of urgent concern. Issued in February of that year, the report “\textit{Rijksgenoten} (Kingdom partners) on social assistance and unemployment (WWV) in Amsterdam” sought to fill a critical gap in administrative knowledge about immigrants relying on social assistance. So urgent was this information for other municipalities and the national government (in particular the Ministry of Culture, Recreation, and Social Work or \textit{Ministerie van Cultuur, Recreatie en Maatschappelijke Werk}, hereafter CRM, who would later spearhead an effort to coordinate the settlement of immigrants from the Kingdom on a national level)\textsuperscript{23} that the

\begin{itemize}
\item[22] See GAS, Archief van de Sociale Dienst 30047 invr. nr. 837 for documents from the workgroup on ‘zeer grote gezinnen.’
\item[23] From the mid to late-1970s, the Ministry of CRM made policy recommendations on immigration via the subgroup “Migrating Groups” (migrerendegroepen), which fell under the rubric of “Categorical Social Development” (“\textit{Categorische samenlevings opbouw}”). At the end of the 1970s, this department was renamed “Directie Culturele Minderheden,” re-labeling immigrants from ‘migrating groups’ to ‘cultural minorities,’ see Penninx, \textit{Wie Betaalt, Bepaalt?}, 20. In 1982, the ministry was collapsed under the newly-created Ministry of Welfare, Health and Culture (\textit{Ministerie van Welzijn, Volksgezondheid en Cultuur}, hereafter WVC), which was renamed the Ministry of Health,
city of Amsterdam prematurely issued its most important findings ahead of schedule, and before
Rotterdam’s Social Services department—also set to collaborate in the report—delivered its
conclusions. Connecting family life to social care, the report unequivocally asserted, “Why do
these roughly six hundred parties require assistance? In order to understand this, we must
consider two things: the family situation and those who are not registered with the
unemployment agency, whereby we can address the reasons why registering was not necessary
or possible.”

In this report and for similar internal documents that would emerge in the
following decade, the family situation of Surinamese and Antillean clients became the most
fundamental correlate from which all other data would be understood. In this instance, “female
heads of household,” accounted for 304 of the 620 Surinamese/Antillean welfare recipients in
Amsterdam, and constituted by far the largest majority of those not registered with the
unemployment agency—a requirement of which was, in return for modest unemployment
assistance, proof of active solicitation of work. The report further concluded that female heads
of household, in general, stayed on welfare longer than their male counterparts, classifying single
mothers as “structural welfare clients.”

By the end of the 1970s, the municipality of Amsterdam had undertaken several research
projects to assess the living situation of citizens from the Kingdom. During a 1977 discussion
with the major municipal housing authorities, the Municipal Bureau of Statistics ordered further

Welfare and Sport in 1994. Each of these ministries played a special role in formulating immigration and
“minorities policy” (minderhedenbeleid) on a national level.
24 GAS, Archief van de Sociale Dienst 30047 invr. nr. 3676, Report “Rijksgenoten in de bijstand en de WWV te
Amsterdam” Feb. 1972. Of the Surinamese and Antillean clients researched in this report, which categorized
welfare recipients by location of birth—a measure that required special research through all client files given that
Antilleans and Surinamese entered the welfare system no differently than European Dutch citizens—92% of clients
were Surinamese and 8% were Antillean; a figure that corresponds roughly with the ratio of Surinamese and
Antilleans living in Amsterdam in 1972.
25 258 women out of 396 people not registered with the GAB—thus over one half—were female heads of household.
Single women without dependents constituted the second largest group of 98 people.
26 GAS, Archief van de Sociale Dienst 30047 invr. nr. 3676, Report “Rijksgenoten in de bijstand en de WWV te
Amsterdam” Feb. 1972.
investigation of the housing demand among Kingdom citizens and, in particular, adequate housing for “extremely large families.” Within two years, municipal authorities established a special “working group for extremely large families” to address the need for larger and more affordable housing in Amsterdam. In the spring and summer of 1979, this working group sought to make an inventory of Surinamese and Antillean families with four or more children and to assess available options for their housing. Alongside a dearth of suitable accommodations, a further challenge that municipal housing authorities confronted was whether a distinction could be made—and priority given—to Surinamese and Antillean families above European Dutch families. At the first meeting of the working group on 25 May, one representative from the Municipal Relocation Services department (GDH) contended that he considered it “nearly impossible” to provide information on those families urgently in need of housing since no distinction could be made among Dutch citizens, yet, “there are 344 urgent cases (urgenten) registered for dwellings of six or more rooms, from which it can be assumed that these people belong to an ethnic minority.” For many civil servants, assumptions about race, family norms, and welfare became interwoven. This manifested in an ambivalent dynamic. On the one hand, municipal and national governments appeared perhaps more invested in understanding and accommodating a plurality of family norms. Yet, while the rights of Dutch citizenship for Surinamese and Antilleans were honored in the realm of welfare, it was also in this realm that the differences of Surinamese and Antilleans from “other Dutch” were painstakingly pointed out, studied and typified.

29 The working group arrived at a combined solution of incentivizing smaller families to trade in their apartments, combining existing units, to a lesser extent, building new dwellings.
In this way, the Caribbean household emerged as both a curiosity and a concern to welfare providers. Troubling, too, was the fact that these migrants entered the welfare system like any other European Dutch citizen. As one civil servant explained, “because *Rijksgenoten* are Dutch, they are not in any way individually distinguished in our records.” In other words, it would take additional legwork to quantify, distinguish and prove the existence of these perceived differences between Caribbean and European Dutch households. What occurred then in this initial phase of Kingdom migration was the problematization of single motherhood in connection with welfare reliance. The problem, according to civil servants, was that lower-class Surinamese and Antillean “creoles” frequently did not marry, had more female householders and children to support and fewer means of doing so, thus requiring greater assistance from the state. This “problem” was attached to concerns ranging from the retraction of the social safety net, and, perhaps more popularly, to anxieties about the erosion of proper morality, intertwined as it was with racial stereotypes of wanton Caribbean sexuality and unruly children. The fact that these concerns peaked at a moment when traditional gender roles were radically contested within mainstream Dutch society is intriguing. Throughout the 1970s and 80s, with the rise of the feminist movement and in the aftermath of the sexual revolution, growing numbers of European

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30 The lack of any coordinated “minorities policy” in the Netherlands until 1983’s *Minderhedennota* reflects the central government’s conviction throughout the 1960s and 1970s that the Netherlands was not an immigrant country, and that ‘ethnic and cultural minorities’ would return to their home countries. This expectation applied not only to some post-colonial immigrants, such as Surinamese and Antilleans, but also to guest laborers from Morocco and Turkey who came to fill the country’s postwar labor shortage in the 1960s. See Penninx, "Research and Policy with Regard to Ethnic Minorities in the Netherlands," and *Wie Betaalt, Bepaalt?*, Duyvendak and P. W. A. Scholten, "Beyond the Dutch 'Multicultural Model,'" *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 12 (2011): 331-348.


32 Here I am drawing on Marlou Schrover’s definition of problematization as discussed in her lecture, Marlou Schrover, *Om De Meisjes, Voor De Meisjes: Een Historisch Perspectief Op Problematisering En Bagatelliseren Van Onderwerpen Die Te Maken Hebben Met Migratie En Integratie* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2011). She identifies the first phase of problematization as the delineation of the problem through, among other things, the introduction of new terms. The second phase, what Schrover terms the “numbers game,” involves the production of facts and statistics that detail how many people are impacted by a so-called problem. She insists this phase is critical for shaping policy and legitimizing a perceived problem.
Dutch women increasingly uncoupled marriage and reproduction. It was precisely at the time when European and Caribbean households began to resemble each other in some surprising ways that a remarkable amount of intellectual energy went into solidifying their differences.

**The Pursuit of “Post”-Colonial Knowledge**

Social scientific research on Surinamese and Antillean single mothers sought above all to illuminate how these households interacted with the European welfare state. In the 1970s-1980s, researchers got their assignments, and sometimes generous funding, from both local and national governments. And, indeed, while the Dutch state invested broadly in academic research on all migrant groups, the enduring political bonds between the Antilles and the Netherlands distinguished research on Antillean Dutch in surprising ways.

Municipal governments carried out the first wave of research on Antillean families. In perhaps an unusual act of bureaucratic creativity, city authorities hired anthropologists and sociologists to investigate household composition and patterns of welfare reliance. Researchers commented anxiously on the changing profile of migrant groups: “It is no longer the better...”

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33 In May 1978, the Ministry of CRM—the foremost national body tasked with coordinating immigration policy and welfare measures for immigrant communities—made this marriage between academic research and the formulation of policy explicit with the creation of the Research Advisory Committee – Cultural Minorities (Adviescommissie Onderzoek Culturele Minderheden, ACOM), a council comprised of researchers working within the emerging field of immigration studies. Although the ACOM and a loose union of categorical organizations, the LAO (Landelijke Advies- en Overlegstructuur Minderhedenorganisaties, LAO) could make suggestions for research topics, power for establishing a government-sponsored research agenda rested ultimately with the government itself. Several important consequences followed from this state of affairs. First, in the government’s alliance with researchers (often European Dutch academics) to inform policy, an opportunity to include actual representatives from categorical organizations and immigrant communities was missed—a point many immigrant groups contested (a subject to which I later return). Second, by the early 1980s, the national government and the Ministry of CRM in particular restricted subsidized research only to topics deemed directly relevant to policy—a fact that shaped the projects undertaken by universities. Finally, however, it was not only universities that emerged as centers of knowledge on immigration and minorities. Indeed, given the emphasis on policy-relevant research, both national and local governments often contracted private researchers to conduct studies and charged them with publishing the results quickly. In this way, several centers of knowledge emerged at the nexus of research and policy: university research, internal research conducted largely by municipalities, and research undertaken by third parties, such as private researchers and demographers. See Penninx, *Wie Betaalt, Bepaalt?*. 
situated and middle classes, but increasingly the socially fragile groups such as the skilled and
unskilled manual laborers, unemployed, school dropouts and families without a breadwinner
(kostwinner). In general, in the past years more women than men have arrived in the
Netherlands. Race also played a determining role in this research. If Surinamese and
Antilleans were ultimately studied apart from European Dutch, they were in the 1970s not
considered apart from each other. Municipal reports almost always considered Surinamese and
Antilleans of African descent together as one undifferentiated group, while other groups—such
as Hindustani Surinamese, for example—received separate attention. Forty pages into one 1977
study by the city of Amsterdam, the author mentions almost as an aside that while single
motherhood was prevalent among Surinamese creoles, it was less common among Antilleans.
Yet, this important qualification is buried forty pages into a report that otherwise made little
distinction between Surinamese and Antillean Dutch. While statistical research shows that the
number of Antillean single mothers did increase in the 1980s, what is interesting here is the fact
that the problematization of single motherhood was prepared ahead of their arrival—in this
sense, the problematization preceded the problem itself. What emerged from this portrayal was
the racialization and feminization of poverty and welfare use.

In one 1975 report on Surinamese and Antillean female householders, municipal researcher
Ineke Gooskens—a sociologist by training—prefaced her analysis of welfare use with a detailed
academic discussion of the matrifocal household. Quite remarkable in these reports is the

34 Ineke Gooskens, Surinaamse Vrouwelijken Gezinshoofden in Bijstand en WWV te Amsterdam: Peildatum 1 April
35 Gooskens, Jenny Hoolt and Mariëlle Freeman, Surinamers en Antillianen in Amsterdam: Verkorte Versie van het
Onderzoeksverslag (Amsterdam: Gemeentelijke Sociale Diense, 1979), 40.
36 On some of these stereotypes, see Briggs, Reproducing Empire, Deborah Ward, The White Welfare State: The
O’Connor, Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History
(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), and Daryl Michael Scott, Contempt and Pity: Social Policy and the
combination of traditional anthropological obsessions with frankly dry statistics on the consumption of social services. According to her definition, borrowed from other seminal works, this was a family where the mother and her female kin took on a central role in providing for the family, owing to either the permanent absence or peripheral position of the father. Gooskens claimed in addition that where the matrifocal household proliferated, so, too, did a range of non-marital relationships—something that likewise earned the attention of other researchers. While marriage may be an aspiration for some Caribbean women, owed to its cost it was often an impractical goal. Such traditions, Gooskens claimed, were foreign to the Netherlands, where "It is...sooner an exception than a rule that a woman is the householder. Among Kingdom partners (Rijksgenoten), the single mother with one or more children, while not a rule, is also surely not an exception."37

Virtually all research on single mothers referenced debates on the origins of matrifocal household, drawing on decades-old studies on the conjugal norms of the African diaspora.38 While researchers echoed Gooskens’ definition of matrifocality, they often debated its historical origins. On the one hand, cultural-historicists argued that the matrifocal family found its origins

37 Gooskens, Surinaamse Vrouwelijke Gezinshoofden in Bijstand en WWV te Amsterdam, 5.
in West Africa or else in the slavery past.\textsuperscript{39} Atlantic slavery not only brought West African family practices to the Caribbean, it also reinforced the strong bond between mother and child given the routine separation of couples and attempts to prohibit and/or regulate romantic relationships among enslaved men and women. On the other hand, “functionalists” insisted that matrifocality emerged above all as a practical response to a bad economic position.\textsuperscript{40} Based on sociological research carried out in impoverished and predominantly African-American and Afro-Caribbean neighborhoods, this camp argued that the father’s role in black working class families was marginal primarily because of his low economic status.

This reprisal of old academic debates may seem out of place amid reports on welfare use in the 1970s-1980s. Yet, researchers insisted that these studies had consequences for their present moment. If, as some scholars suggested, the matrifocal family were cultural, then single parenthood, teen pregnancy, and a variety of non-marital relationships would be likely to continue and proliferate among the Antillean population in the Netherlands.\textsuperscript{41} Alternatively, if single parenthood, higher rates of teen pregnancy and non-marital reproductive relationships were economically determined, then the increased access to social assistance, improved

\textsuperscript{39}There is a vast anthropological and sociological literature on the matrifocal household in the Americas. The field by the mid-late twentieth century was split along two axes: the “culturalists” who insisted matrifocality stemmed from West African conjugal practices or family life organization under slavery, and “culture of poverty” theorists who insisted matrifocality was not historically or culturally determined, but developed in response to contemporary conditions of economic hardship. To be sure, cultural-historicists disagreed intensely among themselves. In his seminal 1939 study, E. Franklin Frazier maintained that patterns of household organization dated back to the history of slavery, in E. Franklin Frazier, \textit{The Negro Family in the United States} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939). Anthropologist Melville Herskovits contended that the matrifocal household prevalent among the African diaspora reflected the continuity of West African cultural traditions in \textit{The Myth of the Negro Past} (New York: Harper, 1958). For a reprisal of this debate, albeit not focused on family organization, see Sidney Mintz and Richard Price, \textit{The Birth of African American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective} (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976) and James Sweet, \textit{Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship and Religion in the Afro-Portuguese World, 1441-1770} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

\textsuperscript{40}Oscar Lewis best represents this line of thinking, although he added that economic constraints led to a self-reproducing “culture of poverty,” an idea that influenced Patrick Moynihan’s controversial 1965 report. See Lewis, \textit{La Vida: A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty—San Juan and New York} (New York: Random House, 1966).

\textsuperscript{41}For this argument, see Gooskens, Hoolt, and Freeman, \textit{Surinamers En Antillianen in Amsterdam}. 
educational and job opportunities in the Netherlands would likely lead to an increase in formal marriages among Antilleans in the Netherlands.\textsuperscript{42} If matrifocality was a cultural tradition stemming from the slavery past or else West African conjugal practices, as some “culturalists” contended, then single motherhood would likely keep apace with immigration.\textsuperscript{43} However, if “functionalists” or “culture of poverty” theorists were correct in stating that matrifocality was a response to economic hardship, then improved socio-economic position in the Netherlands might result in increased marital rates. As immigration continued into the 1980s, demographers tracked the marriage rates and fertility levels among Rijksgenoten, and in their analyses separated these populations from other European Dutch.\textsuperscript{44}

Dutch civil servants were not alone in their embrace of old sociological studies on the Caribbean household. As Kristen Stromberg Childers’ study of the postcolonial French Antilles reveals, French civil servants turned to the very studies employed by Dutch bureaucrats and

\textsuperscript{42} This argument, inspired by Lewis’ \textit{La Vida}, is reflected in the Dutch literature. See van ’t Hoofd and Westerlaken, "\textit{Mi Ta Lora Koene}," and Abraham-Van der Mark, \textit{Yu’i Mama}.

\textsuperscript{43} Gooskens, Hoolt and Freeman endorsed this view in \textit{Surinamers en Antilliaanen in Amsterdam}.

social scientists through the course of Antillean departmentalization in the 1940s-50s.\textsuperscript{45} Although Childers argues that French civil servants and researchers were unmotivated to produce new research on French Antilleans and instead relied upon and reproduced studies of African descended people in disparate times and places, her study nevertheless underscores how sociological literature on the postemancipation Caribbean circulated in an Atlantic space and further highlights the lengthy afterlife that such research enjoyed, owing undoubtedly to dubious ideas of black essentialism.\textsuperscript{46} Indeed, French, British and American researchers studying their countries’ black populations in the latter half of the twentieth century relied upon the very texts that populated in Dutch social scientific studies of the Antillean family.\textsuperscript{47}

In addition to matrifocality, Dutch researchers also sought to create a typology of conjugal relationships found among lower-class Afro-Caribbeans. Like matrifocality, nearly every academic study on single motherhood, and, later on, studies on the use of birth control, sought to portray single mothers within a constellation of complex and varied social and romantic relations. Three types of relationships garnered scholarly attention: marriage—according to Keller, an “unattainable luxury” for working class couples because of the financial stability needed to enter into it\textsuperscript{48}—concubinage and the \textit{bibà}, or visiting relationship. Concubinage, a term that evokes the sexual license of European colonists, was employed here to mean a short or long-term relationship where couples lived together under one roof but did not marry. The “visiting relationship,” or, in Papiamentu, \textit{bibà}, was typically a short-term and, for the man, non-monogamous sexual relationship wherein the couple did not cohabit. Alongside this variety of

\textsuperscript{46} In contrast to European Dutch commentary on Antillean single mothers, Childers argues that French civil servants were preoccupied with deviant masculinity and absent fathers. See Childers, \textit{Seeking Imperialism’s Embrace}, 154. For an overview of the field of Caribbean sociology, see Christine Barrow, \textit{Family in the Caribbean: Themes and Perspectives} (Kingston: Ian Randle Press, 1997).
\textsuperscript{47} On the British context, see Bailkin, \textit{The Afterlife of Empire}, 189-190. On the US context and, see O’Connor, \textit{Poverty Knowledge}, and Scott, \textit{Contempt and Pity}.
\textsuperscript{48} Moor, \textit{Huwelijk En Gezin}. 
relationships, researchers also sought to illuminate the differing ideas around motherhood that prevailed in the Dutch Caribbean. In particular, researchers highlighted the lack of stigma of single motherhood in Antillean society and the central position of motherhood within expectations of appropriate femininity. But perhaps the most astonishing finding for emerging experts of Caribbean family formation was, at least among a large number of Antillean respondents, the preference for single motherhood as a form of freedom from patriarchy.\(^{49}\)

Paradoxically, then, as a growing literature on the Antillean family sought to typify and understand its differences from and consequences for European norms and resources, a number of researchers also pointed out how, in some ways, middle-class European Dutch women increasingly resembled their lower-class Antillean counterparts in the statistically small but increasing preference for raising children out of wedlock.\(^{50}\)

As other scholars have pointed out, the coterminous developments of increased immigration and the mainstreaming of the sexual revolution contributed in the 1970s-80s to a growing accommodation for a plurality of sexual norms.\(^{51}\) Academic commentators at the time pointed out how the “crisis of family and marriage” in the Netherlands, dating back to the immediate postwar period and peaking in the sexual revolution, ushered in growing acceptance for a range of non-marital, non-reproductive romantic relations that social welfare services needed to catch up with. Some scholars predicted that changes in mainstream Dutch society would help to increase acceptance and support for immigrants.\(^{52}\) Why, then, were Antilleans often singled out as uniquely reliant on the welfare state in a time when norms in mainstream

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\(^{49}\) This finding is stressed particularly in van Dijke, van Hulst, and Terpstra, *Mama Soltera*; van Dijke and Terpstra, *Je Kunt Maar Beter Bij Je Moeder blijven*.

\(^{50}\) Moor, *Huwelijk En Gezin*.


\(^{52}\) Moor, *Huwelijk En Gezin*, 9.
Dutch society were changing, too? As other scholars have identified, the mainstreaming of gender equality and sexual progressivism occurred within a political and social landscape saturated by racism. Marlou Schrover has argued that European Dutch women’s rights activists often assumed female immigrants were victims of violent, patriarchal regimes and household relations—and thus aimed to advance women’s rights while simultaneously promoting ideas about the backwardness of immigrant populations.53 While women’s emancipation was a generally stated goal of the Dutch government after 1977, the emancipation of minority women assumed a special role in minority policy, which authorities and scientific researchers alike believed central to the successful integration of immigrant communities.54

While early literature on the topic focused almost exclusively on the ways in which Antilleans confronted the welfare state in the Netherlands, a later cluster of research reaching publication in the late 1980s and early 1990s focused instead on the forms of social assistance, family planning, and sex education that existed in the Antilles themselves.55 As the Dutch state invested ever more resources in gaining knowledge of its Kingdom partner and their increasingly inter-meshed populations, extraordinarily intimate domains were deemed useful and relevant to public knowledge. In one Ministry WVC-funded project, researchers compared uses of

53 Schrover, Om De Meisjes, Voor De Meisjes, and Roggeband and Verloo, "Dutch Women Are Liberated, Migrant Women Are a Problem."
54 In 1979, the National Scientific Council (Wetenschappelijke Raad voor Regeringsbeleid, WRR) commented on the plight of immigrant communities in the Netherlands writ large, stating, "The starting point for many people from the minority groups under discussion is particularly poor. Elementary education is often lacking, with scarcely any prospect of its being acquired. In particular, women and somewhat older children coming to the Netherlands when families are reunited find themselves very awkwardly placed in this respect. Children's academic performance at school is strongly influenced by the home environment. Many parents – and especially the mother, as the one principally concerned with upbringing – can do little if anything to help their school age children. For boys and girls to participate successfully in present-day Dutch education they must have an attitude of independence and motivation towards self-development. Such attitudes can only develop in a family and upbringing situation in which the wife enjoys a position of equal status with the husband and where the issue of authority between parents and children has diminished to the point that the parents do not perceive their children's education as a threat because it exceeds their own. Among a proportion of the minorities, however, family relationships are strongly hierarchical in nature," qtd. in WRR and Penninx, Ethnic Minorities, xii.
55 Humphrey Lamur, Caraïsche Vrouwen En Anticonceptie in Nederland (Delft: Eburon, 1990), Geurts, "Mi Ta Wak," van ’t Hoofd and Westerlaken, "Mi Ta Lora Koene."
contraceptive methods among Antillean women to statistics on the European Dutch population. Using interviews and surveys of Caribbean women resident in the Netherlands, the researchers solicited not only personal histories of their experiences with sex education and the methods of birth control they employed, but also details on the age of their first sexual experience and whether they had ever had an abortion. Indeed, youthful sexuality and “high recidivism” of abortion had become controversial topics in the Netherlands, which had long boasted a low rate of teen pregnancy and abortion. Some alleged that Caribbean migrants had accounted for the spike in these figures in the 1980s-90s. The aim here was to provide background context to policy makers, welfare providers and social workers in the Netherlands, and authors often recommended vigorous campaigns to educate immigrant’s expectations before coming to the Netherlands. The focus on birth control and sexual hygiene in later studies is interesting, too, as it shows how the problematization of Antillean sexuality had evolved since the 1970s, focusing not only on single motherhood, but now also on a web of corollary problems like high rates of abortion and teen pregnancy. The possibility for intervention in the Antillean context was made possible by the unique, enduring relationship between the Antillean islands and the Netherlands.

This shift in the location of academic research in the 1990s is likely owed to several developments. First, by this point the national government in the Netherlands no longer held fast to the expectation of return migration. Secondly, it was also in the 1990s that the Dutch government finally stepped away from its program of “enforced liberation” in the Caribbean parts of the Kingdom. With the disappointing results of Surinamese independence and Aruba’s

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56 Lamur, Caraibische Vrouwen En Anticonceptie in Nederland.
57 These rates, historically low in the Netherlands, had seen an upward tick that the Central Bureau for Statistics in the Netherlands attributed to continuous Antillean migration.
successful transition to an autonomous country within the Kingdom, Dutch politicians at last understood that the eventual independence of the Netherlands Antilles was unlikely to occur and was furthermore unpopular in the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba, which separated from the Antillean state but remained within the Kingdom in 1986. Lastly, in the 1990s, critics of so-called “multiculturalism” launched attacks on the alleged costs of categorical work—the term used to describe social welfare organizations advocating for a particular “category” of immigrants based on their country of origin—to the Dutch state. Assimilation, rather than return migration, thus became the primary goal within policy circles.

Understanding and improving social assistance in the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba could help to stem the tide of immigration and ease its alleged pressures on the welfare state. Again, an investment in welfare and knowledge—this time on the other side of the Kingdom—served a dual purpose: improving the living conditions of Antilleans in the Antilles to dissuade Antilleans from immigrating to the Netherlands. Closer and some might say more interventionist ties thus transformed yet again by the 1990s, with increased funding being channeled from the Netherlands to NGOs working with single mothers in the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba. The renewed Dutch interest in directly funding such projects, which waned after anti-colonial revolt shook the Kingdom in 1969, coincides with patterns of increased migration from the Antilles and with the recognition that the Antilles may maintain a perpetual link with the Netherlands that included, not least, freedom of movement to Europe. In this time period of flux and uncertainty within the Kingdom, the decolonizing state solicited new kinds of information on the ways in which girls and young women learned about sex, their ideas about motherhood, and practices around childrearing. This information was deemed essential to shaping welfare and immigration

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59 For Dutch funding of NGOs on Curaçao focusing on women’s issues, see Rodriguez, *The Rise of Women’s Rights on Curaçao*, 244-245.
policy, and also to informing the personal interactions between European social workers and Antillean single mothers.

Within colonial studies, there has been a tendency to view the production of knowledge as an extremely insidious process that was instrumental to maintaining colonial rule. I ask whether the energy spent on developing expertise had more of an ambivalent than a coercive impact. While the production of social scientific knowledge no doubt helped to solidify notions of difference between European and Antillean Dutch, the interest generated by this excessive focus on single mothers likewise opened some avenues for Antillean welfare activists in the Netherlands to make claims against the Dutch state. Significantly, it was also on the terrain of social science that Antillean activists in the Netherlands sought to change the terms of debate on women and welfare. It is to this subject that I now turn.

Welfare as Activism

If welfare became a subject of academic inquiry and the focus of immigration policy, it also became a site of activism. Under the rubric of categorical work, Antillean Dutch established numerous social welfare organizations throughout the 1970s-80s to help Antilleans upon first arrival in the Netherlands. These nationally and locally established groups helped to,  

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60 See footnote 5 of this chapter. 
61 In the 1970s-1980s, the Dutch government subsidized so-called “categorical” organizations to provide social and material support to various “categories” of immigrants. As such, immigrant groups often organized around their ethnic and national origin. On the history of categorical immigrant organizations, see Bosma, *Terug Uit De Koloniën: Zestig Jaar Postkoloniale Migranten En Hun Organisaties* (Amsterdam: Bakker, 2009). Fridus Steijlen, a scholar of Indonesia, the Moluccan islands, and Moluccan immigration in the Netherlands, and who was part of the initial wave of social scientific research on immigrant groups in the Netherlands, maintains that these policies stemmed from bureaucratic creativity. Contrary to later critics of “multiculturalism,” who argued that categorical work perpetuated divisions and prevented assimilation among immigrants, Steijlen contends that civil servants embraced categorical work in their effort to form the “makeable society,” (maakbare samenleving)—a refrain of the leftist den Uyl government—that would eventually enhance harmony and peaceful co-existence among varied groups in the Netherlands. Interview with Fridus Steijlen, Leiden, the Netherlands, 23 February 2016. For the critique of multiculturalism, see Paul Scheffer, *Immigrant Nations* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011).
among other things, connect Antillean Dutch to educational and job opportunities and appropriate social service providers, and to facilitate social interactions through the creation of youth and community centers. Examining the records from some of these organizations found in the municipal archives of Amsterdam and the national archive in The Hague, as well as in the rich collection of organizational ephemera found in the KITLV collection in Leiden, highlights the contested field of welfare and social science.

For some leaders of Antillean welfare organizations, broadening the access of Antillean Dutch to the welfare state served as a critical struggle within an anti-imperial project, offering a path toward achieving a radical kind of equality within a unified Kingdom. While citing revolutionary anti-colonialist thinkers such as Frantz Fanon and Marcus Garvey, the spokesmen for the radical Antillean welfare organization, Welzijnswerkers Vereniging Surinaamse en Antilliaanse (VSAW), promoted a model of anti-colonial overcoming that did not rely on separation from the Netherlands, but the enhanced and equal presence of Antilleans in mainstream Dutch society. While greater scholarly attention has been given to more dramatic eruptions of radicalism in the Netherlands Antilles, such as in the Trinta di mei revolt, the tradition of black radicalism among social welfare activists merits attention for the ways in which its interlocutors viewed strengthening ties between former colony and metropole as the ultimate path for advancing decolonization. Notably, at a point when the national government shunned any mention of race in its “ethnic and cultural minorities” policy, welfare activists sought to rally others around the principle of racial solidarity. They fiercely criticized the preponderance of white European Dutch within both academic research on immigrant communities and social work. These activists also paid sustained attention to the ways in which

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women of color faced unique discrimination at the intersection of race and gender.

Prominent organizations like *Plataforma di Organisashon Antiano i Arubano* (POA) and *Kibra Hacha* tried to change the tenor of conversations regarding women and welfare on several fronts. First, they commissioned their own research on single mothers and often received government funding to do so. *Mama Soltera* was one such product of this partnership between academic researchers and categorical organizations, and their main intervention was to jettison stereotypes of Caribbean women as the “dupes” of a macho culture. These authors insisted that lower-class Antillean mothers were not victims of absentee fathers but, in fact, women who had in many ways preferred single motherhood as a form of economic and social independence from men. According to subjects interviewed, having children was central to their definition of appropriate femininity. Using women’s testimony as evidence, in contrast to simply pulling welfare client files, they also made policy recommendations to improve circumstances for single mothers. In this way, experts and activists worked together.

Another way in which Antillean welfare organizations tried to change the terms of debate was to situate the struggles of single mothers within a broader context of Antillean emancipation. For these commentators, empowering single mothers was not simply a matter of getting them to marry or form double-income households, it was about giving them social and economic

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63 POA was established as an umbrella organization for smaller Antillean organizations in 1984, following recommendations from the Dutch government to centralize categorical work. Kibra Hacha was established in 1971 and received a major government subsidy from the Ministry of CRM to serve as the premiere categorical organization for Antilleans in Utrecht. For this chapter, I researched the periodicals and ephemera of numerous Antillean and Surinamese social welfare and categorical organizations, including *Kontakto Antiano, Kambio, Hacha, Waya, Suran, Suranta, Union Antiano, VSAW*, and *LSWA*, as well as conference and workshop reports organized by these and other groups on the topics of women, welfare, and single mothers.


confidence more broadly. Activists tried to make this connection clear via informational sessions and instructional materials sent to welfare providers and social workers. This pamphlet reminded its readers, “The position of Antillean women in the Netherlands cannot be seen apart from the neo-colonial history of the Netherlands and the Antilles… We view the struggle of women together with the emancipation of the whole Antillean population.”

Other groups echoed the complex meaning of Antillean women’s liberation at a moment of uncertainty in the Kingdom. Aruba’s status aparte in 1986, when it left the Antillean state but remained in the Kingdom, renewed discussions on the possibility of Antillean independence. This led some Antilleans to question whether their rights as Dutch citizens would continue to be recognized if ties were amended. One commentator argued that maintaining this life line was, indeed, the postcolonial duty of the Netherlands, whose welfare state owed its abundance to painful histories of colonization and exploitation. In this way, categorical organizations insisted that welfare would be critical to overcoming the inequalities that colonialism produced.

While the voices of single mothers themselves do appear in activist materials, it does seem that this group was more frequently spoken for or about. Antillean organizations often expressed difficulty in reaching these women who were, quite simply, too busy to attend organizational meetings. In this way, the chatter around single mothers seems to have been at times more about other issues beyond these women themselves. As this chapter has shown, discussion about single mothers was often a way of discussing the contours of belonging in the postcolonial Netherlands, and the allocation of resources and welfare tethered to notions of citizenship—issues very much linked to the postcolonial order of things. Within Antillean organizations,

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67 Schemes to restrict Antillean immigration even in a unified Kingdom have periodically surfaced in Dutch parliament dating back to 1970s—although were ultimately rejected by the Den Uyl cabinet. On this issue, see Jones, "Tussen Onderdanen, Rijksgenoten En Nederlanders."
single mothers became a kind of cause for strengthening the welfare apparatus. As the central government reduced funding for categorical organizations through the 1980s, focus on the plight of single mothers proved to be one effective way of getting the government to listen and offered a discursive space in which these organizations could continue to assert their vision of a more egalitarian Kingdom.

Despite this activism, important welfare provisions would be reduced rather than expanded in the decades following mass Antillean migration. This is especially true of the National Assistance Act, which was established in 1965 to provide economic self-sufficiency for individuals, especially single parents who could not work because they were responsible for raising children. By 1996, this changed: single parents with children over age five were required to work (previously they did not have to until their children were teenagers), and payments became smaller in order to incentivize labor participation. Of course, without adequate childcare, educational background, and language comprehension, this was particularly devastating for many newcomers to the Netherlands, not just Antilleans. But Dutch policy makers singled out Antillean women as unique among other migrants—and they based this contention on a corpus of state-funded research undertaken between the 1970s-1990s that explored the connection between single motherhood and welfare reliance. This information served to legitimize and solidify understandings of Antillean immigrants as singularly problematic among other immigrant groups, and it did so, again, on the terrain of reproductive politics.

In the early 1990s, as welfare resources came under fire by Dutch parliamentarians, the ministry responsible for social affairs commissioned research that examined not only the kinds of

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68 See footnote 14 of this chapter.
social services that immigrants relied upon in the Netherlands, but also the ends to which they used financial assistance from the state. In one 1992 report, the authors stated, “according to our informants, Antilleans form the migrant group with the most problems.” These authors maintained that Antillean problems in Dutch society stemmed from “the purchase of luxury goods, debt, lack of knowledge about social services, great dependence on institutions, and so forth.” According to this report, these issues escalated with the changing demographic profile of Antillean migrants after 1985—in particular with the immigration of poor single mothers and their children. With impending changes to the National Assistance Act, authors studying welfare reliance recommended reducing financial assistance and enhancing childcare services and education on pregnancy prevention for Antillean women.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has explored how the perceived demands of Antillean immigration resonated in the Dutch welfare state and manifested in the remarkable interest in the alleged eccentricities of the Antillean household. At the same time, the preoccupation with single mothers also inflected Antillean claims for equality *within* the Dutch welfare state. Despite the ultimate retrenchment of social welfare and welfare activism by the 1990s, the period between the onset of Antillean migration in the 1970s until the scaling back of the social safety net by the 1990s nevertheless witnessed the unprecedented level of interest—intellectual and material—in Antillean Dutch, an interest that centered predominantly on the realm of the household.

Even if the “gains” of this investment were short-lived, the history of these decades is nevertheless consequential for scholars of colonialism and decolonization. Against the grain of

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traditional narratives of decolonization, this chapter has argued that European interest in the cultures, lifestyles and habits of Antilleans emerged only at empire’s end. The creation of expertise helped to consolidate notions of European and Antillean difference at a moment when mobility across the Kingdom increased. Within colonial studies, there has been a tendency to view the production of knowledge as an extremely insidious process that was instrumental to maintaining colonial rule. As Nicholas Dirks has argued, “Colonial knowledge both enabled conquest and was produced by it. In certain important ways, knowledge was what colonialism was all about.”70 Colonial knowledge production disseminated expertise on environments, peoples and things that could aid in their control and subjugation. It could also in a more abstract sense consolidate notions of difference that ideologically paved the way for European domination, as Edward Said so importantly argued.71 Was the redoubling of investment in postcolonial social science then simply a continuation of its colonial predecessor? To be sure, the production of knowledge on Antillean households consolidated notions of difference between Antillean and European Dutch and provided an arsenal of statistics about what Antillean mothers cost the welfare state. In this way, postcolonial knowledge produced and concretized difference among ostensibly equal Dutch citizens.

Yet, it might be worth questioning whether knowledge production was a uniquely colonial phenomenon. Striking in the history of the Kingdom of the Netherlands is that such investment in knowing Antillean Dutch appears at a very late date. In fact, government subsidized research on the Antilles appears only at empire’s end, in the 1940s-50s, when the

democratization of Kingdom ties made urgent familiarity with the islands.\textsuperscript{72} If colonialism in this part of the world was characterized by disinterest and neglect, then it was in the era of decolonization that the Kingdom at last assumed the distinctive traits of familiar colonial powers: including, not least, an invasive and interventionist will to know. Such a view offers us not simply a postcolonial rehashing of the imperial project. Instead, it suggests that in some places, characteristics of modern imperial power might not have mattered to the metropole until empire ended.

More still, focus on expertise shows us that the creation of closer trans-Atlantic ties was forged in surprising venues. Concerns among social workers, researchers and others about single motherhood merited unparalleled investment—above all in gaining knowledge of the intimate behaviors of those living at the margins of the former Dutch empire, places that once stood at the periphery of public interest. In the 1970s, despite Dutch attempts to move the Antilles toward independence, these two Kingdom partners became increasingly inter-twined through the experience of immigration and its demands. By the late 1980s, one out of every six people born on the Antillean islands lived in the Netherlands, leading some commentators to dub the Netherlands as the “seventh island.”\textsuperscript{73} Placing this particular chapter in the “seventh island” reminds us that these intensifying bonds were consequential to many European and Antillean Dutch in the former metropole, too. The Kingdom is, after all, not something that only islanders are compelled to live with. Housing authorities, civil servants, social workers, scientific

\textsuperscript{72} While other funding bodies emerged after the announcement of imperial reform in 1942, the largest and longest-lasting organization that sought to enhance knowledge of the Antilles and Suriname was the Foundation for Cultural Cooperation Between the Netherlands, Indonesia, Suriname and the Netherlands Antilles (\textit{Stichting voor Culturele Samenwerking tussen Nederland, Indonesië, Suriname en de Nederlandse Antillen}, Sticusa), founded in 1948 and dissolved in 1989. Sticusa is the subject of one book-length monograph, Jos de Roo and Albert Helman, \textit{Groot Geld Tegen Klein Geld: De Voorgeschiedenis van Sticusa} (Amsterdam: Sticusa, 1988) and Oostindie and Klinkers discuss the organization’s dizzying bureaucratic reshuffling in \textit{Decolonising the Caribbean}, 207-214.

\textsuperscript{73} IISG, \textit{Kontakto Antiano}, December 1971, vol. 3 no. 7-8, p. 35.
researchers and activists in the Netherlands in the 1970s-80s all saw their work drastically transformed by evolving Kingdom ties. And it was in no small part because of these evolving ties that the nature of the Dutch welfare state itself changed, expanding in the 1970s and ultimately retracting in the 1990s. In this instance, concern with single mothers brought together a chorus of voices in sometimes cacophonous and in other times harmonious ways.
Chapter Five


On the morning of July 10, 2008, over six hundred people crowded into a gymnasium on Bonaire to discuss mounting concerns over the island’s integration into the Netherlands. Leading the informational session, Dutch Secretary of Interior and Kingdom Relations, Ank Bijleveld, hoped to clarify the changes that awaited the island’s population and two others, Saba and St. Eustatius, when it would assume its status as a public administrative entity of the Netherlands in two years. The meeting, however, quickly grew tense when Pastor Ramiro Richards requested a definitive answer about whether same-sex couples would be allowed to marry on the island after 2010. Bijleveld responded cautiously: “It is not our plan to take away your culture, but in time, if you are going to implement Dutch law, then [gay marriage] is part of the package.”

The following day on the radio, Richards railed against his island’s political leaders for selling the rights of Bonairean people to the Dutch government for no more than “a plate of beans.” Before it was too late for the island’s 16,000 inhabitants, Richards urged, “let us fight against the sin and evil that await us.”

While the international media framed this event and the struggle over the legalization of same-sex marriage in the Antilles as a culture clash between the presumably liberal Netherlands and its conservative Caribbean territory, few commentators questioned how evolving trans-Atlantic ties inflected this controversy. With the debate over the legalization of same-sex

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1 I use the terms “gay rights,” (homorechten) “gay marriage,” (homohuwelijk) and “gay emancipation” (homoemancipatie) to reflect the language of parliamentary sources.
marriage as my point of focus, I argue that conflicts over sexual politics played a pivotal role in refashioning the Dutch state in a brief but critical period of transition from 2007 when the expansion of sexual freedoms became a top priority for Dutch parliamentarians overseeing the restructuring of Antillean governance, until 2012, the year that the first same-sex marriage occurred in a Caribbean jurisdiction on the Dutch island of Saba. Changes in the legal status of marriage equality factored into the broader process of Antillean restructuring, the outcome of decades of Antillean discontent over the modes and methods of governance in the five-island state. On the symbolically chosen date of October 10, 2010, and after five years of negotiation among Dutch and Antillean leaders, the state of the Netherlands Antilles ceased to exist. The islands comprising the former state willfully dissolved political ties among themselves, and instead forged a range of intensive bilateral ties with the Netherlands. Far from rupturing traditional bonds of solidarity, the dissolution of the Netherlands Antilles synthesized the trends that characterize the Kingdom’s postcolonial history and which this dissertation has sought to illuminate: the forging of closer and steadily strengthening trans-Atlantic ties at empire’s end, as well as the growing fragility of bonds among the islands themselves.

Although transitioning the island governments of Curaçao and St. Maarten toward autonomous country status within the Kingdom demanded the majority of diplomatic efforts, it was on the islands of Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba, the so-called BES islands, where daily life changed most drastically. Unprecedented in the history of the Kingdom, the decision to forge “direct constitutional ties” between these islands and the Netherlands opened a heated debate on whether Dutch law on abortion, same-sex marriage, and euthanasia should apply in the BES
islands. This chapter considers the role that sexual politics and ethical questions played in the uneven incorporation of the BES islands into the Netherlands. On the one hand, Dutch politicians erroneously insisted that the islands had “chosen to become Dutch,” and thus insisted on expanding sexual rights even as they problematically circumvented others—notably, the extension of equal social welfare spending on pensions, health care, and schools. Additionally, because of the unilateral way in which the Dutch determined ethical policy, it became difficult, indeed untenable, to be at once anti-imperial and sexually progressive on the BES islands, marginalizing Antillean activists who had nurtured a strong, homegrown gay rights movement. The decision in the BES islands to forge “closer ties” with the European Netherlands thus evoked considerable concerns about the intimate consequences of reformed political relations.

The willful incorporation of the BES islands into the metropolitan Netherlands, and the controversy that ensued over the eventual implementation of so-called “ethical laws” on gay marriage, abortion and euthanasia, makes urgent a reevaluation of the politics of intimacy as an enduring legacy and tension of imperial aftermaths.

This chapter thus seeks to understand how ongoing debates over Antillean autonomy manifest in transatlantic discussions of sexual politics. Reflecting on conversations in Dutch parliament and the international press, I chart how the debate over sexual freedoms evolved as a Kingdom-wide discussion from the run-up to Antillean dissolution in 2007 to the first same-sex marriage on Saba in 2012. In a political climate where defending certain sexual freedoms defines Dutch citizenship, many members of Dutch parliament stressed the importance of enforcing Dutch law on same-sex marriage, abortion, and euthanasia as a requisite for Antillean integration. Crucially, the coalition of left and right parties supporting the immediate

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4 Oostindie and Klinkers mention this debate very briefly in their study of Antillean dissolution, which is otherwise centered on the transitioning to autonomy of Curaçao and, to a lesser extent, St. Maarten, in *Gedeeld Koninkrijk*, 230-232.
implementation of “ethical laws” avoided addressing the historical relationship of inequality between The Hague and the Antilles. These parties excluded the BES islands from their deliberations and, with tremendous latitude, improvised policies for ambivalently incorporating Caribbean territories into a Dutch legal regime. In the Netherlands, and however paradoxically, the unilateral implementation of marriage law in the Caribbean drew the sharpest criticism from far right Christian parties who disagreed with sexual liberalization and the resurgence of neo-colonial attitudes among Dutch parliamentarians. For some on the BES islands, Dutch efforts to codify sexual rights evoked specters of a colonial regime seeking to restrain cultural and political autonomy. Yet for others, Antillean dissolution opened new paths for advancing sexual rights. Antillean activists’ alliances with Dutch politicians and gay rights organizations, however, widened the seeming separation between the causes of sexual progressivism and anti-colonial resistance.

The Last Act of Decolonization?

Despite the endurance of political relationships throughout the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Gert Oostindie attributes their longevity less to contentment with the postwar settlement than to the rigidity of the constitution that binds them. Though never intended to serve as an “eternal edict,” revising the Charter of the Kingdom of the Netherlands—the constitutional document organizing relations within the Kingdom—requires the unanimous agreement of all partners although problematically offers no method for resolving gridlock amongst the Kingdom’s partners. In the former Netherlands Antilles, dissatisfaction with governing arrangements ran deeper. Centrally administered from Curaçao, the remaining islands

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of the Netherlands Antilles expressed discontent with Curaçao’s privileged position.\(^6\)

Alternatively, the wealthier islands of Curaçao and Sint Maarten resented the financial and political obligation to their smaller partners.

Despite decades of discontent among the islands, a pattern explored in previous chapters, it was not until the opening of the twenty-first century that The Hague committed to reforming the Netherlands Antilles. The process began in 2000 when Sint Maarten issued a referendum on their future political status within the Kingdom. With a long tradition of separatist aspirations, sixty-nine percent of voters indicated their preference to become an autonomously governed country within the Kingdom.\(^7\) Although Dutch government officials initially balked at the decentralization of the Antillean state, popular enthusiasm for a wholesale revaluation of the Antillean state throughout the Dutch Caribbean eventually compelled the attention and support of the Netherlands over the next several years.

Referenda issued across the Netherlands Antilles in 2004 and 2005 confirmed the widespread desire for change. The referenda offered a choice between four political statuses, asking voters:

A. Do you want to remain in the Antillean constellation?
B. Do you want direct ties with the Netherlands?
C. Do you want autonomous status within the Kingdom?

\(^6\) Since Dutch colonization began in the seventeenth century, the colonial state experimented with different administrative groupings of the Antillean islands. From the middle of the nineteenth century, however, the colony of “Curaçao and Dependencies” joined Aruba, Bonaire, St. Eustatius, St. Maarten and Saba under an administrative capital in Willemstad, Curaçao. In the parliament of the Netherlands Antilles, Curaçao held 14 of its 22 total seats. It is also worth noting that the islands of the Netherlands Antilles are located many miles apart, divided amongst the Leeward islands of Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao, and the Windward Islands of Saba, St. Maarten and St. Eustatius. On Saba and St. Eustatius, which at various points in history came under British rule, the recognized regional language is English. In the Leeward islands, Papiamentu is the recognized regional language.

\(^7\) Oostindie and Paul Verton’s survey study of Antillean popular opinion on political relationships between the Netherlands and the Netherlands Antilles showed that higher percentages on St. Maarten had, since the 1990s, voted for separate status or independence;. Oostindie and Verton attribute this to disenchantment with the Antillean government in Curaçao and confidence in the sound governance of their own local government. Oostindie and Verton, “Ki Sort Reino?/What Kind of Kingdom? Antillean and Aruban Views and Expectations of the Kingdom of the Netherlands,” \textit{New West Indian Guide} 72 (1998): 64-65.
D. Do you want independent status?*

A majority of voters on Sint Maarten and Curaçao chose option C, desiring to remain within the Kingdom of the Netherlands while assuming legislative and governing responsibility within their own island jurisdictions. On Bonaire and Saba, over fifty percent of voters chose to develop direct ties with the Netherlands. St. Eustatius, the only island voting to preserve the Netherlands Antilles, approved in a reissued referendum the development of direct ties with the Netherlands.

When island governments initially issued status referenda in 2004 and 2005, it was unclear what precisely “direct ties” with the Netherlands might look like beyond simply the transfer of some governing responsibilities from Curaçao, former seat of the government of the Netherlands Antilles, to the Netherlands. On 2 November 2006, Dutch and Antillean officials finalized the decision to dissolve the Netherlands Antilles per the referenda results. Together with Dutch officials, elected representatives from the BES islands decided to forge “direct ties” with the Netherlands based on Article 134 of the Dutch Constitution.¹⁰ The BES islands would thus be integrated as “public entities” of the Netherlands, a status that made the BES islands administrative divisions of the Dutch state but did not group them into a province. At an as yet unspecified date, and after each of the islands met requirements for autonomous statehood and constitutional integration, the Netherlands Antilles would cease to exist, marking a new phase in nearly four centuries of transatlantic relations.

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9 Oostindie and Klinkers, Gedeeld Koninkrijk, 181.
10 Ibid., 167. This form of incorporation meets the United Nations’ standard for self-determination of former colonies, which can take three forms: full integration, independence and associated statehood. See Sutton, introduction to Governance in the Non-Independent Caribbean.
Political Climate and Divisions in The Hague

Despite the consensus achieved on Antillean reorganization in 2006, in the Netherlands the process of constitutional restructuring occurred against the backdrop of acrimonious debates on immigration and citizenship. Anxieties surrounding identity and belonging in the Dutch state emerged in parliamentary discussions over the integration of the BES islands and reflected the primacy of sexual rights in defining Dutch citizenship.

Since the Netherlands became the first country in the world to legalize gay marriage in 2001, the country is widely recognized for its acceptance of sexual minorities. Yet a mainstream antihomophobia politics in the Netherlands has only begun to develop recently. Since the 1990s, rightist parties like by Pim Fortuyn’s List Pim Fortuyn (LFP) and later Geert Wilder’s Party for Freedom (PVV) have, with stunning electoral success, promoted a pro-gay marriage, anti-immigrant political platform. The argument runs that the acceptance of gay rights and women’s rights, celebrated markers of Dutch identity, clash with the ostensibly homophobic and sexist views of the Netherland’s large Muslim immigrant population. Within recent years, the arrival of Antilleans in the Netherlands has also drawn increased scrutiny from Dutch parliament, where alleged criminality, poor education and the high rate of unemployment amongst Antillean-born immigrants have met with controversial efforts to restrict the free movement of people within the Kingdom. For parties like the PVV, only the total desertion of the Antilles promises

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11 To be sure, antihomophobic and pro-feminist political movements have played a larger role in Dutch political life since the 1960s. However, that both left and right parties can build consensus on issues like gay marriage is a relatively recent phenomena and has developed concurrent to debates on immigration and citizenship. See Mepschen and Duyvendak, “European Sexual Nationalism,” 70-76.

12 This included, controversially, naturalization processes for Antilleans despite the fact that Antilleans are considered Dutch citizens and carry Dutch passports. In 2009, the Rijkswet Personenverkeer received tremendous backing from a broad coalition in parliament. The act planned to restrict movement of people throughout the Kingdom born outside of the European Union. As Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) within the European Union, this would discriminate against the access of Antillean-born citizens to the mainland Netherlands. Parliament also approved a controversial measure to develop a database registering Antilleans suspected of criminal behavior, called the Verwijsindex Antillianen, which could be used to bar entry of suspect individuals to the
to halt immigration to the Netherlands and protect spending on social welfare services. One PVVer even controversially proposed auctioning off the Antillean islands on marktplaats.nl, the Dutch variant of eBay.\(^\text{13}\)

Dutch support for Antillean independence has increased in step with the belief that the Antillean islands cannot adequately handle issues of good governance, economics, crime and civil rights, and therefore demands intensified Dutch intervention. The expansion of sexual freedoms in the Caribbean territories of the Kingdom has thus occurred against this backdrop, initially moving to the forefront of Dutch-Antillean relations in 2007. That year, a Supreme Court case on same-sex marriage in Aruba threw light on the limits of Antillean autonomy and galvanized members of parliament to make “gay emancipation”\(^\text{14}\) a goal of constitutional restructuring. The catalyst was a lawsuit filed by Dutch and Aruban couple Charlene and Esther Oduber-Lamers on Aruba in 2004.\(^\text{15}\) The couple wed legally in the Netherlands in 2001, shortly after same-sex unions became legal. After the public registry in Aruba refused to recognize the couples’ marriage, the Oduber-Lamers’ filed a lawsuit for discrimination. In episodes dramatically recounted in the press, the couple fled back to the Netherlands after the case incited negative public attention and even violence against the Oduber-Lamers on Aruba. Although

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\(^\text{14}\) I draw this term from an amendment later proposed by the major crusaders in Dutch parliament for same-sex marriage, who in March 2010 proposed researching whether “homosexual emancipation in the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba is making sufficient progress,” see “Motie van de Leden Van Gent en Remkes,” Tweede Kamer, 4 March 2010.

\(^\text{15}\) In 1986, Aruba separated from the Netherlands Antilles but remained within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Arubans, therefore, carry Dutch passports but are otherwise autonomous with regard to finances, public services and laws. The Netherlands is responsible for defense.
their efforts would eventually succeed, the strong emotions resulting from the couple’s legal struggle, “underlined a deep cultural rift between liberal Holland and its conservative former colony.”\(^\text{16}\) Aruban officials, stating that gay marriage struck at “the very heart of Aruban life,” were dubious about the ruling’s implications. One Aruban official asked, “If we accept gay marriage, would we next have to accept Holland’s marijuana bars and euthanasia? They have their culture, we have ours.”\(^\text{17}\)

Strikingly, the international press glossed over the ambiguous colonial relationship between Aruba and the Netherlands and emphasized instead the clash in sexual mores between the “liberal” Netherlands and Aruba, the conservative perpetrator of homophobic discrimination. Scholar Natasha Omise’eke Tinsley argues that the misplaced emphasis in the international press on a “culture clash” overlooked, “what part of public reaction was fueled by homophobia and what part by anticolonial sentiment – by resentment that Aruba was bound to recognize the Netherlands’ laws despite its autonomous status, and that Dutch travelers and Dutch legislature dictate the day-to-day realities of this place, right down to its intimate relationship.”\(^\text{18}\)

Troublingly, the international press would continue to disavow the legacy of imperialism immanent within contemporary Kingdom relations when discussions began over the integration of the BES islands.

A month before the Supreme Court was set to rule on the Oduber-Lamers case, and whilst ongoing discussion over the legal assimilation of the BES islands, a representative of Democrats66 (D66)—a progressive social liberal party who had publicly supported the Oduber-


\(^{17}\) Quoted widely in the press, see “Dutch & Arubans At Odds Over Gay Marriage,” Associated Press, 21 August 2005. Natasha Omise’eke Tinsley also commented on the controversy and the hesitancy to address the legacy and history of colonialism in her book *Thieving Sugar: Eroticism between Women in Caribbean Literature* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 30-32; however, she does not locate this struggle within the context of Antillean dismantlement.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 31.
Lamers—requested that the Minister of Justice clarify the future of Dutch marriage law on the island of Bonaire. The year before, Bonaire finalized plans to develop “direct ties” with the Netherlands although the precise designs for assimilation, as yet an unprecedented event in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, remained unclear. Boris van der Ham, member of D66 implored, “If Bonaire becomes a new municipality of the Netherlands, I assume that Dutch same-sex marriage laws will also be in force…In the coming time surely there will be a lot of compromises made with Bonaire. We request that the government not compromise over the equal treatment of people.” 19 Early on in political negotiations, then, extending same-sex marriage to the integrated Dutch Caribbean became a key goal for progressive politicians.

As Antillean dissolution loomed throughout the following years, parliamentary response to Van der Ham’s initial behest laid bare the major divisions in Dutch government that would remain in place in the run-up to Antillean dismantlement. Support for the legalization of same-sex marriage in the BES islands unified a broad coalition of parties, including D66 and GreenLeft on the left and PVV of the populist right, and liberal-centrists like the People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD). On the Christian right, however, parties like the Reformed Political Party (SGP), Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) and Christian Union (CU) resisted the introduction of “ethical laws” into the BES islands. Meanwhile, the government leaders with the greatest responsibility for Antillean affairs, including the Minister of Justice and the Secretary of Interior and Kingdom Relations, defended a moderate and gradual implementation of Dutch law together with intensive input from the islands. These key figures, however, relied on the legislative authority of the parliament to define how precisely the “public entities” would join the Dutch state, and, likewise, how the Dutch state would expand to include the Caribbean.

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19 Tweede Kamer, 13 March 2007, 47-2815. The debate took place shortly before elections, and although the Left spearheaded the discussion on gay rights, groups like the Party for Freedom (VVD), who are more right leaning and explicitly anti-immigrant yet radically pro-sex, supported the left’s positions in these debates.
The Minister of Justice’s reply to van der Ham illuminates one of the curious tensions in these discussions. Hirsch Ballin, then Minister of Justice and a major figure in Antillean affairs since the 1990s, argued that van der Ham’s reductive statement that Bonaire would become a new municipality of the Netherlands overlooked a much more complicated juridical process that would take many years to define. While the ultimate goal would be to achieve the closest possible harmonization between the laws of Bonaire and the Netherlands, the Minister reasoned that, at that time, “the question will arise whether there must be greater consensus over civil law throughout the Kingdom, but we are bound to address this in consultation [with the islands].”

For Ballin, the question over gay marriage was primarily a juridical issue, the major stakes of which centered on the democratic inclusion of the islands in legislative decision-making. This notion of democracy, however, clashed with some amongst the left who emphasized the protection of equal individual rights over popular democracy. These two notions of democracy—space for collective and popular decision making, on the one hand, and the injunction to defend equal rights for all individuals—would crosscut each other throughout parliamentary discussion.

“Gay Emancipation” and the Incoherence of Equal Individual Rights

As the Minister of Justice pointed out, because the BES islands would integrate into the Netherlands as “public entities,” the juridical relationship of the BES islands to the Netherlands required separate provisions and processes. Parliamentarians grew increasingly restless over the ambiguity of this status. MPs agitated to move beyond the discussion of the Antilles’ economic relation to the Netherlands and on to social issues of broad import. Two MPs in particular

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20 Ibid.
became the most vocal and insistent proponents of extending Dutch marriage legislation in the Caribbean. In the heated run-up to Antillean dismantlement between 2009-2010, VVD representative Johan Remkes and member of GreenLeft Ineke van Gent issued a series of amendments to secure Dutch marriage law in the Caribbean. Their arguments and the support they garnered in the House of Representatives show the difficulty of embracing programs at once sexually progressive and democratically inclusive.

At the close of the parliamentary year in December of 2009, Van Gent and Remkes issued the first in a series of amendments designed to place gay marriage at the top of parliament’s agenda during the next congressional year. This jointly-sponsored amendment recommended:

The prospective changing political relations must seek to ensure equal treatment for all citizens and must exclude discrimination on any grounds…the chamber requests the government to ensure no later than 10/10/2010 that people of the same sex can legally marry anywhere within the Kingdom per the new political relations.

Strikingly, this amendment proposed to legalize gay marriage even within autonomously governed parts of the Kingdom. Although the 2007 Supreme Court decision in the Oduber-Lamers case ensured the recognition of same-sex marriages throughout the Kingdom, this amendment proposed a drastic curtailing of autonomy in the interest of defending “equal treatment” of and eradicating discrimination amongst citizens. As parliamentary discussion

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21 While this chapter ultimately explores, among other things, how other European Dutch parliamentarians challenged Remkes’ and Van Gent’s uneven pursuit of “equal treatment” for Antillean Dutch, it is perhaps illustrative to note that the same year the VVD fought for “gay emancipation” in the Antilles, the party also supported a measure that would restrict the immigration of Antillean-born Dutch to the mainland Netherlands. See “Personenverkeer Binnen Koninkrijk Heet Hangijzer,” in Radio Wereldomroep Nederland, 6 July 2010. http://www.rnw.nl/caribiana/article/personenverkeer-binnen-koninkrijk-heet-hangijzer.

unfolded throughout the following months, commitment to dissolving “discrimination on any grounds” within the Kingdom took ambivalent and often contradictory forms.

To widespread approval, parliament approved the Van Gent and Remkes amendment when the representatives convened early in 2010 to discuss legislation in the BES islands. In a move some mocked as “political opportunism,” a number of parties rushed to support the “emancipation” of Antillean homosexuals just several months before parliamentary elections.23 A member of the Socialist Party (SP) reflected on whether the BES islands would need to adopt Dutch marriage law and stated, “The SP-faction respects that until today the islands have had their own responsibilities, but now that they want to become part of the Netherlands, the SP no longer regards this difference as justified.”24 Citing the Netherlands’ own historic decision to legalize same-sex marriage, Remkes argued that no one at the time entertained pardoning more conservative municipalities from implementing the law. To excuse the BES islands from national marriage law would now be comparably absurd. And although the PVV supported political independence for the Antilles, in this instance the controversial PVV-er Hero Brinkman (who proposed selling the Antilles on marktplaats.nl) echoed the majority of parliamentarians, opining, “If the BES islands indicate that they would like to be part of the Netherlands, then some things go with this. In negotiations it should then be very simple and one-dimensional: if you want that, that is fine, but then you must also accept gay marriage.”25

Two salient points emerge through these discussions. The first is the parliamentarians’ unproblematic acceptance that the BES islands, in choosing to develop direct ties with the Netherlands, wished to integrate fully into the Dutch state and to accept all Dutch law. Indeed,

25 Ibid., 35.
parliamentary insistence that the islands must assimilate fully into the Netherlands gained increased traction only after 2009 as plans for Antillean dissolution concretized. The timing suggests that, at the outset, full integration in the Netherlands was neither the plan nor the intention. As I will later explore, the equation of “direct ties” with total legal assimilation became a major point of contention between some politicians from the BES islands and their constituents, on the one hand, and the Dutch parliament on the other. Secondly, however, is the pervasive assumption amongst Dutch parliamentarians that in exercising popular self-sovereignty in the 2004-2005 referenda, the islands henceforth forfeited rights to collective and popular negotiation during the transition process.

Van Gent’s comments demonstrate parliament’s restrained interpretation of Antillean sovereignty as justified by the defense of sexual freedoms. In an emotional appeal to the parliament she argued, “Let one thing be clear: when it comes to the equal treatment of citizens within the Kingdom, when it comes to gay marriage, the position of the woman, abortion and euthanasia, then the onus is on us not to compromise (marchanderen).” If, as Van Gent argues, the Netherlands must work to secure these rights throughout even the autonomously governing parts of the Kingdom, then by what logic could the Antilles resist Dutch intervention? Members of parliament thus implicitly suggested that only total independence could protect self-sovereignty in the legislative process.

Such arguments illustrate the extent to which the logic of territorial sovereignty looms in the minds of many Dutch people and policy-makers. Although unrepresentative in its vitriol, Brinkman’s (PVV) comments to a mixed audience of Dutch parliamentarians and Antillean leaders are significant: “Self-determination is not only for colonial peoples, but also for the

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26 Ibid., 42.
Netherlands. Self-determination is not just an instrument of decolonization. The Dutch people want out of the Charter. The PVV provides that.”27 The third largest political party in the Netherlands and a key member of the coalition government in 2010, Brinkman’s sentiments surely resonated with many Dutch people. Yet even among the comments of more moderate parliamentarians one can detect that Dutch and Caribbean aspirations for independence have been hard to reconcile with the reality that this might never occur. Speaking on behalf of the Dutch Labor party, Antillean-born John Leerdam stated resignedly, “The Labor Party is not concerned with false solutions, not with ways to remove the Antilles and Aruba from the Kingdom against the will of their people…We all know that this is impossible within the Charter of the Kingdom and under international law. And that the inhabitants of the islands are free to decide their own future. So be it.”28 Leerdam followed this momentary reflection on the impossibility of independence with a passionate appeal to reinvigorate political cooperation throughout the Kingdom. The pep talk, however, contained little by way of creating a representative body of all constituent countries, in the absence of which Dutch law and Dutch institutions operate as the de facto legislatures of the Kingdom writ large. Failure to take seriously the Kingdom as a political unit—not the Netherlands as a state unit leading the Kingdom—enabled the endurance of the Kingdom’s “democratic deficit.”29

In situating defenses of gay marriage in a discourse of civil liberties and human rights, parties such as the VVD and GreenLeft downplayed the importance of negotiation with the BES

28 Tweede Kamer, 2 December 2009, 32-3066.
29 Oostindie and Klinkers argue that the so-called “Contactplan,” a regularly scheduled meeting amongst officials from the Netherlands and the Antillean islands, was designed to remedy this deficit, the body’s lack of legislative authority rendered it merely an advisory or steering body. Surrounding the dissolution of the Netherlands Antilles, other ideas were proposed to lend credence to the de facto authority of the Dutch House of Representatives and the Senate throughout the Kingdom, such as extending voting rights for the parliament to Aruba, Curacao and St. Maarten. Ultimately, however, consensus could not reached on creating a Kingdom-wide parliament or a Kingdom secretariat and the “democratic deficit” remains an unresolved issue in the Charter of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Oostindie and Klinkers, Gedeeld Koninkrijk, 102.
islands as a form of liberty and rights. The broad coalition of parties supporting the extension of Dutch marriage law in the Caribbean implicitly argued that the island’s decision to integrate into the Netherlands invalidated the need for collaborative decision-making. Although I will later discuss the different interpretations of integration on the Antillean side, my interest here lies in questioning how Dutch parliamentarians employed an outmoded logic of national decolonization and the language of sexual progressivism to justify Antillean exclusion in the process of defining public entity status. The rhetoric of “choice”—of choosing to become Dutch—enabled parliamentarians to both avoid questions of historical and structural inequality and to unilaterally define public entity status in the BES islands. Sexual politics in this case afforded an extreme expansion of Dutch responsibilities in the wider Antilles, challenging traditions of cultural and political autonomy.

The belief that sexual rights in the Antilles must be won and fought for by the Dutch raises problematic questions about the historical relationships between Europe and the Caribbean. In jettisoning a historical framework from their discussions, the majority of parliamentarians overlooked the disturbing irony that the former colonial authority was now, in the name of sexual progressivism, proposing to educate former colonies about protecting human rights and civic freedoms. Writing on British aid conditionality and LGBT rights in Africa, political scientist Rahul Rao warns that such, “a contemporary rerun of the civilising mission: the spectre of the erstwhile imperial power and its white dominions berating the black and brown Commonwealth for its backwardness is not one that is likely to engender the sort of change that its proponents wish for.”

30 Strikingly, these historical blinders enabled parliamentarians to...
refashion “public entity” status as, on the one hand, undifferentiatingly Dutch vis-à-vis sexual rights and, on the other hand, unequally entitled access to the coffers of the Dutch welfare state. Members of the Christian right attempted to draw attention to the incoherencies of this logic in an effort to obstruct the legalization of same-sex marriage, abortion and euthanasia in the Caribbean.

Questioning the Past, Contesting Sexual Rights: The Dutch Christian Right

If the parties supporting the legalization of gay marriage in the BES islands marginalized the history of imperialism in their efforts to expand sexual rights and freedoms, the same cannot be said of the minority of Dutch parties in opposition to so-called “ethical laws.” From the inception of the gay marriage question in 2007 to its ultimate legalization in the BES islands in 2012, the parties of the Christian right31 criticized the neoimperial chauvinism latent in arguments to introduce gay marriage, abortion, and euthanasia in the Caribbean. Cleverly obviating a critique of the “ethical laws” rooted in Christian morality—an unwise political move in a largely secular parliament—the Christian right instead called attention to the echoes of imperialism in the parliament’s unilateral decision-making process. Although typically the intellectual preserve of the left, the Christian right appropriated the language of anti-colonial powers. See Luis Abolafia Anguila, “Aid Conditionality and Respect for LGBT People Rights,” Sexuality Policy Watch, http://www.sxpolitics.org/?p=7369. See also the report on the colonial origins of anti-sodomy laws and their contemporary repercussions in India, Malaysia and Uganda produced by Human Rights Watch, This Alien Legacy: The Origins of “Sodomy” Laws in British Colonialism (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2008). I cannot find any reference to anti-sodomy laws in the early modern Dutch Caribbean, although it is reasonable to assume that such provisions existed given that anti-sodomy laws were on the law books in certain Dutch cities until the adoption of the Napoleonic Code in 1811.

31 The orthodox Calvinist Reformed Political Party (SGP) is perhaps the most sexually conservative Dutch party. The oldest political party in the Netherlands, the SGP is known as a “testimonial party” given its primary interest in emphasizing Christian principles versus participating in the coalition government. Even the SGP’s website goes offline on Sundays in observance of the Sabbath. Although a minor faction holding just two seats in the House of Representatives, members of the SGP typically vote in alliance with the ChristianUnion (CU), another Protestant party. Together with the more mainstream Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA), these Christian parties tend to vote alike on issues relating to sex and sexuality.
critique in parliament and again in 2012 when the BES islands’ voted in their first Dutch national election. Their arguments bring to the fore the troubling estrangement between sexual progressivism and anti-colonial resistance.

Early discussions in 2007 reveal the peculiar affinity between homophobic and anti-imperial politics. When D66 insisted that the Minister of Justice legalize gay marriage on Bonaire, the SGP immediately indicted the left’s condescension, “The SGP has an understanding of Bonaire’s objections to gay marriage, and stronger yet: we share these objections. My faction takes issue with the spirit of neocolonial patronizing from the left, who, with a raised finger think they can help the whole world achieve gay marriage.”\(^{32}\) The CU also repudiated the left’s neocolonial “civilizing mission” and argued that the rhetoric of equal rights for all citizens throughout the Kingdom concealed their opponent’s hypocrisy. Especially in the final year of deliberations over BES island legislation between 2009-2010, mention of gay marriage in parliament often derailed debates over pension, health insurance and social relief spending. During one such contentious debate in January 2010, Curaçao-born CU representative Cynthia Ortega-Martijn called attention to discrepancies in the VVD’s campaign for “equal” treatment throughout the Kingdom, arguing, “On the other hand we have just debated social security and insurance. In that instance Remkes was a supporter of structurally unequal treatment. I just don’t understand that.”\(^{33}\) Although Remkes retorted that the cost of living in the BES islands was cheaper than in the Netherlands, he did not discuss how widespread changes after 10/10/10 might raise the price of commodities to unprecedented levels.

The ultimate creation of separate social security laws, standards for schools and hospitals, even the introduction of a separate currency (USD) in the BES islands lay bare the

\(^{32}\) Ibid.
\(^{33}\) Tweede Kamer, 20 January 2010, 39.
improvisational and selective process of Caribbean integration. As Minister of Justice Hirsch Ballin cautioned early on, “Of course we can say here from a Dutch perspective that it is desirable to eliminate the differences between ‘public entities’ and Dutch municipalities. [The BES islands] will not be Dutch municipalities with hearth and home; they have their own input. We must follow this procedure.” And yet the effort to legally guarantee sexual freedoms in the BES islands highlights perhaps more than any other issue just how far many members of parliament were willing to stray from the injunction to include the islands during the transition process. While less damning in their critique than the SGP, the more moderate CDA remained dubious over the outcome of swift and unequivocal assimilation. Prominent CDA representative Bas Jan van Bochove argued:

The Final Declaration of 2006 states that a significant part of Dutch-Antillean legislation will remain in force in the three islands, and that Dutch legislation will be introduced gradually…The argument to handle things in this manner received the support of the CDA. The immediate and full implementation of Dutch legislation works to disrupt many things of the islands. This applies to the immediate—I would say almost decreed—introduction of gay marriage…The CDA will not cooperate on direct implementation as a condition for supporting the process of political change.

Members of the left rushed to point out how the lives of same-sex desiring men and women in the Antilles were “disrupted” by social discrimination and demanded an immediate clarification

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34 Notably, in 2010 legislation for old age and retirement pensions, known as the AOV on the islands and the AOW in the Netherlands, was applied in the BES islands. The maximum amount for BES island residents was established at USD $524 per month, while pensioners in the mainland Netherlands are entitled to a maximum amount of 1,064 euros per month. Child benefits were not issued on the BES islands until 2016, with a maximum payment of USD $38 per month, per child. In the Netherlands, parents receive 63-91 euro per child, per month, dependent upon the age of the child. On old age pensions, see Central Government, “Sociale Voorzieningen op BES Eilanden Aangepast,” https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/actueel/nieuws/2010/04/19/sociale-voorzieningen-op-bes-eilanden-aangepast. Statistics on child benefits found in P. Hofmann, “Waarop is Kinderbijslag BES Gebaseerd?” http://caribischnetwerk.ntr.nl/2015/11/25/vvd-waarop-is-kinderbijslag-bes-gebaseerd/.
35 Tweede Kamer, 13 March 2007, 47-2813.
of van Bochove’s personal support for gay marriage, all the while ignoring the process agreed upon in the 2006 Final Declaration, which resolved to dismantle the Netherlands Antilles.

Despite the Christian right’s appeals for the left to be historically mindful and politically consistent, the parliament resolved the “homosexual question” against the advice of leading government officials and the minority of Christian right opposition both in the House of Representatives and the Senate.\(^{37}\) After Van Gent and Remkes introduced yet another amendment to hasten the introduction of same-sex unions from 2015 to 2012, the Senate approved these and other plans for legally assimilating the BES islands on May 12, 2010. Among a diverse package of laws, the ethical laws drew the greatest opposition both in their content and form. One senator from the CDA claimed:

> It is incomprehensible that a majority of the House took the view that they need to regulate these highly sensitive subjects for the residents of the three islands—and without any form of consultation with the island councils and their leaders. The CDA respects why residents of the BES islands have expressed misunderstanding on this point.\(^{38}\)

Facing tremendous time constraints just several months before the Netherlands Antilles would cease to exist, the Senate was forced to swallow their misgivings and approve of the legislation.

The controversy, however, did not end with the Senate’s approval. Two years after the historic dismantlement of the Netherlands Antilles occurred on October 10, 2010, the SGP capitalized on the enduring chasm between sexual progressivism and anti-colonial resistance. Just a month shy of the planned date for legalizing same-sex marriage, the SGP launched an aggressive campaign in the Caribbean as residents of the BES islands prepared to vote in their

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\(^{38}\) “Eerste Kamer Stemt in met Nieuwe Staatkundige Positie BES-Eilanden.”
first Dutch national elections. In published party statements circulating in the Antilles, the SGP promised:

Much has transpired within the Kingdom in the recent past... The SGP finds it undesirable that the BES islands, which are part of the Netherlands, have ethically reprehensible things imposed upon them... Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba must have the flexibility to reject abortion, euthanasia, gay marriage and prostitution. They must not be coerced into accepting such matters.39

Full-page ads running in Antillean newspapers and posters appearing throughout the BES islands stated, “The SGP is a Christian party. That’s our bottom line... That’s why the SGP supports classic marriage. We are against gay marriage. Many people on the islands think the same way. Good. Stay that way.”40 After running these campaigns in the 2012 elections, the SGP, long the holder of two seats in the House of Representatives, increased their representation to three seats. The election had been the most successful to date, drawing a record 196,834 votes for the party.

In reflecting on the breadth of parliamentary discussion in the run-up to Antillean dissolution, this chapter has sought to illuminate a process of discursive and political foreclosure: for government leaders and, as will later be shown, for some residents of the Antilles, supporting the advancement of sexual rights while simultaneously resisting the unilateral and expansive intervention of the Dutch was an untenable and impossible position. While GreenLeft and the VVD undoubtedly spearheaded the parliamentary struggle for “gay emancipation,” broad support for their measures enabled the parliament to abandon initial plans for collaboration with and inclusion of the BES islands. Insisting that the choice to “become Dutch” meant the wholesale adoption of Dutch law, however, proved more expedient to advancing ethical

legislation. In matters of social welfare spending, parliamentarians held fast to the distinctions between public entities and municipalities. Thus it fell to the Christian right, the only political group who could risk unambiguity in their position on sexual freedoms, to question the incoherencies and inequality latent within their opponents’ rationale. This process of foreclosure carried over into the Antilles, where political and religious leaders and gay rights activists grappled with the dangers and promises of closer metropolitan ties.

The Sexual Politics of Integration in the BES Islands

Many people on the BES islands opposed parliament’s decision to accelerate the enforcement of ethical laws. Emphasizing the undemocratic and zero-sum process by which the islands would “become Dutch,” and highlighting the religious and cultural differences between the European Netherlands and their overseas entities, political and religious leaders on Bonaire and St. Eustatius attempted to halt the legalization of gay marriage and even threatened to abandon integration efforts entirely. Despite initial resistance on Saba, the island’s leaders supported the advancement of gay rights and promoted same-sex marriage tourism by the time same-sex marriage became legal in 2012. While the international press and mainland Dutch politicians frequently cast Antillean opposition as an extension of conservative Catholic social mores in the Caribbean, surfacing in Antillean discussions are anxieties over the loss of local autonomy and attempts to reconfigure the meaning of sovereignty in an integrated state. Given the parliament’s insistence that the islands must become legally Dutch, leaders and activists in the BES islands operated within a narrowed discursive space wherein support for same-sex marriage could be understood as encouraging Dutch hegemony in the process of legal assimilation.
As Antillean dissolution drew nearer, island representatives from Bonaire and St. Eustatius challenged parliament’s interpretation of public entity status. For leaders from Bonaire and St. Eustatius, the question of same-sex marriage became a focal point of disappointment and frustration regarding the future of political relations between the Netherlands and BES islands. Tensions ran high when Antillean and Dutch politicians met in The Hague in 2009 to discuss how to amend the Charter. That year, Bonaire’s ruling party lost its majority and in its place ascended the Partido Demokrátiko Boneriano (DPB). Bonaire’s new government was outspoken in their criticism of The Hague and attempted to reverse integration, calling instead for autonomous statehood within the Kingdom. With this change in 2009 and with intensified parliamentary discussions that year, representatives from both Bonaire and St. Eustatius increasingly denounced actions in The Hague, in particular the hastened introduction of what some Antilleans deemed the “anti-social laws.”

Representatives from Bonaire and St. Eustatius drew attention to the ways in which the transition process by 2009 strayed from the political imaginaries of the 2005 referenda. Although discussion over same-sex marriage was not on the parliament’s agenda when Antillean and Dutch representatives met to negotiate the Charter, Ramoncito Booi, leader of the second largest political party in Bonaire, the Union Patriotico Bonairano (UPB), wasted no time in raising the issue, “I find it unethical that suddenly [the implementation of the law] has been shortened from five to two years and that we need to swallow that. I do not think this is the right

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41 Oostindie and Klinkers note that the government had previously cooperated with transition efforts; Gedeeld Koninkrijk, 37 and 223. Furthermore, the nationalist party insisted that a new referendum be issued in light of the perceived illegality of unilateral decision-making in The Hague that worked toward complete legal assimilation. Although a new referendum was issued two months after Bonaire became a public entity, low turnout amongst the eligible voting population rendered the vote null. Although 88% voted against integration, low voter turnout—around 34% of the eligible voting population—rendered the results null. See Charlotte Duifj and Fred Soons, “Zelfbeschikkingsrecht Bonairien, Statianen en Sabanen,” Amigoe, 4 November 2011. http://www.amigoe.com/napa/napa/90017-zelfbeschikkingsrecht-bonairien-statianen-en-sabanen.
form.”

Grounding opposition to the legalization of same-sex marriage in a moral discourse of democratic rights, and not a moral discourse of appropriate sexuality, Antillean politicians hoped to expose how The Hague had disavowed the terms established during the 2006 Final Declaration. Statian representative Reginald Zaandam stated warily that the people of St. Eustatius were “sitting in a constitutional train racing towards an endpoint they did not choose,” and opined: “I am able to ascertain from the literature that for self-determination to cease to exist for an area, that area with free will and without any coercion must make the decision to be integrated. My island is not freely integrated! Therefore I say that it is important—for me it is sacred—to examine how the right [to self-determination] has been maintained after 10-10-10 in the island territory of St. Eustatius.”

For these politicians, parliament’s decision to legalize same-sex marriage without consulting the islands confirmed that The Hague had not bargained in good faith, usurping Antillean autonomy and unilaterally imposing the terms of integration.

The Antillean and Dutch presses followed the debate on gay marriage closely. With the press as mouthpiece, Statian politicians continued the campaign at home to prevent the legalization of gay marriage. Although ultimately unsuccessful, the island council of St. Eustatius unanimously accepted an amendment to halt the introduction of same-sex marriage, abortion, and euthanasia on the island and threatened to invoke the United Nations if the Dutch did not comply with their request. One official argued, “During the process, the Netherlands indicated that they would take into account the fundamental human rights of the residents of the islands. Gay marriage, euthanasia, and abortion are here morally rejected and are diametrically opposed to our community and culture.”

While Dutch politicians as well as sympathetic Antillean leaders and gay rights activists framed gay rights as human rights, Statian politicians

42 Tweede Kamer, 15 April 2010, 39.
43 Ibid., 42.
defended their opposition to gay marriage in the language of human rights centered on principles of self-determination and democratic inclusion. However, it was precisely because St. Eustatius sought the right to self-determination within an integrated Kingdom that some Dutch observers dismissed the amendment as a “losing struggle.” A Dutch constitutional scholar said, “I would not know what they would be able to ask the UN. The discussion always concerns the question of when you can become an independent country, not about what kind of legislation applies internally within countries.”\(^{45}\) Such conflicts reveal the limited means for discussing and arbitrating conflicts in political spaces that are neither fully independent nor wholly integrated.

For others on Bonaire it was not simply infractions against autonomy that threatened island rights. Indeed, as the transition date loomed, a flurry of Dutch officials arrived to reorganize health and social welfare services, economic bureaus, and even to rebuild prisons. One Bonairean pastor lamented, “The arrival of large numbers of European Dutch has led to moral decay amongst the island’s populace.”\(^{46}\) Referencing the general public opinion across the Antilles, one resident claimed, “The Netherlands wants to bring their pernicious values here in exchange for debt forgiveness.”\(^{47}\) Closer ties with the Netherlands thus promised to restrict Antillean claims to autonomy while also threatening morality and culture on the islands. Yet politicians, religious leaders and commentators in the press who emphasized the “big cultural and emotional shocks” that awaited the BES islands in the aftermath of integration found the issue of cultural autonomy inseparable from concerns over democratic debate and inclusion. A resident of St. Eustatius summed up the affinity between these issues: “These are issues that


\(^{46}\) Quoted in “Dutch Antilles Go to the Polls,” 22 January 2010, http://vorige.nrc.nl/article2465343.ece

affect our culture, customs and religious sensibilities. You cannot just one day change the rules. This requires first a public debate.”

In discussions over same-sex marriage, Antillean “culture” emerges as a major roadblock on the path of sexual progressivism. At least for the Dutch politicians who framed Antillean resistance as a matter of cultural difference, it is unclear what precisely is meant by “culture.” In its abstracted form, notions of cultural difference worked to secure an image of Europeans as the bearer of progressive, liberal rights and residents of the Antilles—in particularly those who are gay-identifying—as victims of a conservative, intolerant culture. The region’s Christian religiosity plays a central role in imagining the cultural estrangement between the Netherlands and the Caribbean. Although many scholars of the Caribbean have rejected the idea that Christian respectability alone informs sexual mores in the region, they have nevertheless taken seriously sexual conservatism as a response to the history of European-labeling of the region as hypersexual. Writing on European stereotypes of the Caribbean, sociologist Kamala Kempadoo writes, “Polygamy, tribadery, sodomy, rape, adultery, prostitution, incest, bestiality, pederasty and sexual profligacy as well as a perceived lack of modesty were taken as prime indicators of inferiority.” Throughout the colonial period, notions of hyper-sexuality functioned to justify European coercion based on racial difference. In a curious reversal, today it is the region’s perceived conservatism that rationalizes Dutch interference in the Antilles. The question remains to what extent the opposition to “ethical laws” in the Antilles stems from fear over the loss of political and cultural autonomy or from moral conservatism. One answer might

48 Quoted in Kooistra and Muddle, “BES Verzet Tegen Homohuwelijk.”
49 Some scholars have understood the politics of respectability and Christian Orthodoxy as a response to European insistence that enslaved, racial others were hypersexual, although scholars of the Caribbean increasingly challenge the reality of this thesis while taking seriously its historical basis. See Peter Wilson, Crab Antics: The Social Anthropology of English-Speaking Negro Societies of the Caribbean (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973).
50 Kemala Kempadoo, Sexing the Caribbean, 30.
be that incorporating attention to Antillean comments on “culture” can expose the false binary between anti-colonial resistance and moral opposition.

Antillean politicians and residents thus looked to the future of political relations between the two regions and the disappointed aspirations for forging more equitable forms of political association in the Kingdom. For many in the Dutch Caribbean, the issue of sexual politics portended a future of political marginalization and exclusion. One columnist in Bonaire stated, “The amendment to introduce gay marriage, abortion and euthanasia – done without consulting the islands – has shown to many people at once how the relationship will be after 2010.” Like the Dutch Christian right, some politicians pointed out the ambivalent interpretation of full European integration. A Saban deputy asked, “In other areas, such as the level of salaries and benefits, there are differences between the Netherlands and the BES islands. Why not also on ethical grounds?”

Even on Saba, where political and popular support for Dutch legislation emerges as the outlier amongst the BES islands, enthusiasm for Dutch law eroded neither political imaginaries for intensified forms of democratic inclusion nor the possibility for eventual separation. Chris Johnson, a leading deputy from the island, stated in the Dutch press: “In our Island Council we have a member who is openly gay. There are other same-sex couples on the island, too. But this does not take away from the fact that the people would like to have a say in the way we shape legislation.” During a later debate, Johnson quoted Multatuli, a nineteenth-century Dutch author whose writings denounced the abuses of Dutch colonialism in the East Indies, stating, “Multatuli wondered if people in the future would say about Indonesia: once there were Dutch

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52 Quoted in Kooistra and Muddle, “BES Verzet Tegen Homohuwelijk.”
53 Ibid.
people in this land. We cannot see the future, but through [the Charter] the Netherlands offers Saba the security that Saba does not need to depend in perpetuity on anyone, if ever the Dutch leave the West.” 54 Significantly for Saban politicians, the choice to cooperate with Dutch law—whether on same-sex marriage in particular or during the transition process in general—was seen as an exercise in sovereignty, not as overwhelming evidence of its curtailment.

On October 10, 2012, two years after the Netherlands received “thousands of non-Western ethnic minorities living in municipalities overseas,” gay marriage became legal on Bonaire, Saba and St. Eustatius. Shortly after the first gay couple wed on Saba in December 2012, numerous articles appeared in the international gay press with headlines such as, “Legalization of Gay Marriage Sends Saba’s Popularity Soaring,” and “Tiny Island Becomes Same-Sex Marriage Refuge.” 55 Saba’s Minister of Tourism, himself an openly gay man, announced that he would use gay marriage in promotional materials for the island’s tourism and reported that inquiries had poured in from around the Caribbean after an Aruban and Venezuelan wed last year. 56

Curiously, two groups claimed responsibility for Saba’s historic legalization of gay marriage, the first island in the Caribbean to allow same-sex couples to legally marry. The Saban press stressed that the legalization of gay marriage was a homegrown effort, an “initiative

54 Tweede Kamer, 15 April 2010, 95.
56 Gregory Mitchell’s thought-provoking essay, “TurboConsumers in Paradise: Tourism, Civil Rights, and Brazil’s Gay Sex Industry,” in American Ethnologist 38 (2011): 666-682 argues that the influx of male North American tourists seeking same-sex companionship in Brazil has tethered notions of equal rights to consumer power. Gay tourists traveling to Brazil brought with them significant capital and a moralizing attitude about the universality of gay identity. Whether or not promoting gay tourism in Saba will result in the similar affinity between consumer power and rights remains to be seen.
that came entirely from Saba itself,“ and attributed the achievement to Carl Bruncamper, a gay-
identifying Island Councilman who won support for same-sex marriage by defending it as a
human rights issue. Meanwhile, the president of COC Netherlands, the largest gay rights
organization in the Netherlands, congratulated the COC’s dedication in bringing marriage law to
the Dutch Caribbean.

As these varied interpretations suggest, the advocacy of Dutch gay rights organizations in
the Antilles has had an ambivalent impact. A small group of activists working together across
the Antilles actively supported the legalization of gay marriage in the islands and crusaded for
the social acceptance of gay rights more broadly. These activists, however, appealed their
arguments to the Dutch parliament and aligned with Dutch gay rights organizations to advance
their cause, further compounding the estrangement between sexual progressivism and anti-
imperialism. In 2008, FOKO Curaçao, the largest Antillean gay rights organization, wrote a
letter appealing to the Dutch House of Representatives urging them not to allow any of the BES
islands to integrate without first agreeing to uphold Dutch legislation on same-sex marriage.
Moreover, they asserted, “The excuse that Antillean politicians offer, that…gay marriage would
not fit with Antillean culture is incorrect, and besides, if it were true, then it would nevertheless
be unacceptable that Antillean leaders’ misguided vision of their own culture takes precedence
over the civil rights and international treaties arising from legal principles of equality.” In
opposition to the majority of Antillean politicians, FOKO publicly endorsed the Dutch parties
such as GreenLeft. And when the legalization of gay marriage appeared imminent, FOKO

57 “The ‘Wiegerambtenaar’ is Also Welcome on Gay-Friendly Saba,” Sabanews.nl, 12 December 2012.
http://www.sabanews.nl/0_wordpress/the-weigerambtenaar-is-also-welcome-on-gay-friendly-saba/
58 Ibid.
59 Michael Lavers, “Saba Becomes First Caribbean Island to Legalize Same-Sex Marriage,” Washington Blade, 19
December 2012. http://www.washingtonblade.com/2012/12/19/saba-becomes-first-caribbean-island-to-legalize-
same-sex-marriage/
received significant financial support from the COC in order begin educational outreach in the BES islands.\textsuperscript{61}

While activists on Saba and Bonaire joined in founding the Pink-Orange Alliance, a Dutch and Caribbean gay rights and activist network, St. Eustatius, probably the most outspoken in their disagreement with Dutch legislation, rejected invitations to participate.\textsuperscript{62} Meanwhile, the leader of the newly erected Diversity Bonaire, a sister organization of FOKO and member of the Pink-Orange Alliance, expressed hope for the future of gay rights on the BES islands precisely because the islands would become part of the Netherlands. He stated: “In the Netherlands there are rights to protect everyone regardless of sexual orientation—that’s what I want in Bonaire.”\textsuperscript{63} In other words, sexual progressivism in the Caribbean could be achieved because of Dutch leadership and example.

FOKO leader Mario Kleinmoedig, however, found the reliance on Dutch leadership to be a frustrating legacy of unequal relations between the Dutch and the Caribbean. Perceptively, Kleinmoedig argued that this legacy obscured the difference between “autonomy and one’s own culture on the one hand and voluntary discrimination of minorities on the other.”\textsuperscript{64} Although he dismissed critics stating that the implementation of ethical laws was “neocolonial,” Kleinmoedig nevertheless felt that the history of colonial relations forced Antillean reliance on Dutch leadership in the struggle to win sexual rights:

First, it is a big scandal that the Antillean states, in the fifteen years that the Antillean gay rights movement has existed, never addressed our calls for a homegrown Antillean gay

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\textsuperscript{64} “Column Kleinmoedig in Gay Krant,” \textit{Antiliaans Dagblad}, 22 May 2010.
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emancipation movement, and that the [Dutch] parties have never invited us into
discussion. Secondly, as an autonomous but non-independent country, we have little
access to international arbitrators, which leaves nothing left for us to do than follow along
with the Kingdom government and the Kingdom parliament.65

Kleinmoedig’s comments illustrate how the legacy of colonialism and the configuration of non-
sovereignty have foreclosed avenues for advancing sexual freedoms and forced reliance on
Dutch leadership. The issues of constrained sovereignty, foreclosed options, and the narrow
imagination of an international order unable to contend with alternate forms of statehood
resonate throughout the Dutch Caribbean and the non-self-governing world. Yet Kleinmoedig
also seized upon the historic moment of integration to advance sexual freedoms in the Antilles, a
struggle he defended as Antillean in origin and yet compatible with—indeed made in some ways
possible by—closer ties with the Netherlands. In this instance, the condition of non-sovereignty
provided for the radical extension of certain freedoms at the same time that it foreclosed others.

Conclusion

As this chapter has attempted to show, the controversy over same-sex marriage in the
Dutch Caribbean played a formative role in shaping the political relationship between the
Netherlands and the BES islands from 2007 to 2012. I have argued that the integration of the
BES islands as public entities followed an improvised course, and that the implementation of
Dutch legislation on gay marriage, abortion and euthanasia did not originate in a carefully
planned policy of total legal assimilation. Rather, the accelerated enforcement of these laws
deviated from plans to preserve a degree of legislative autonomy in the BES islands and, more
importantly, to include soon-to-be public entities in negotiations concerning their political

65 Ibid.
futures. Throughout I have examined the ways in which the history of Dutch colonialism in the Caribbean has entered into discussions on sexual freedoms, and how interpretations of this history by Dutch and Antillean politicians has rendered incommensurable the goals of sexual progressivism and anti-imperialism. In exploring how sexual rights are denounced and defended in the Dutch Caribbean we can understand more fully how lingering colonial relationships continue to inform notions of rights, citizenship, and state-building.

Through the negotiation of sexual rights, Dutch and Antillean politicians have simultaneously struggled over the boundaries and nature of Antillean autonomy. Frequently, Dutch politicians countered the frustrations expressed in the BES islands by arguing that the islands “chose” to become Dutch. On the other hand, Antillean opponents of same-sex marriage grounded their resistance to sexual freedoms in the interest of defending cultural mores and autonomy. These rhetorical moves in Europe and the Caribbean raise three questions. First, how and in what ways have the “choices” of the BES islands regarding their political status within the Kingdom been determined or constrained by a legacy of dependence? Secondly, how might the controversy over same-sex marriage currently experienced in the BES islands have originated in former colonial policies? Indeed, the presence of the Catholic Church and the sexual conservatism on Bonaire, now deemed problematic by many Dutch officials, had traditionally served as the keeper of Dutch culture in the late-colonial era. While religious attitudes in the Netherlands have changed considerably in the postwar period, at least in the present discussion on sexual rights, Dutch ability to unilaterally define and measure notions of “progress” appears as a troubling holdover of the colonial past.

66 My thinking on the importance of these questions has been influenced by my reading of Abolafia Anguita on LGBT rights and aid conditionality in “Aid Conditionality and Respect for LGBT People Rights.”
Lastly, in what way does the rhetoric of “choice”—and, in particular, of “choosing to become Dutch”—continue to assume a normative model of decolonization resulting in national sovereignty and self-determination? Many Dutch people and politicians hold fast to the hope that one day their former Caribbean dependencies will move toward total independence. Unlike former colonial attachment to Indonesia, which stimulated popular Dutch national imagination and pride in the nineteenth century, the Caribbean then as now remains for many Dutch people a distant region possessing little in common beyond a shared ruling family. With the logic of national self-determination as the dominant paradigm for framing and claiming rights, Dutch politicians have been empowered to dismiss both Antillean resistance to asymmetrical relationships of power as well as possibilities for meaningful exchange in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, taunting Antillean Dutch to “leave” the Kingdom if they are displeased with it.

Antillean insistence to remain within the Kingdom in spite of these grievances and Dutch ambivalence regarding their continued presence in the Caribbean reads against received narratives of colonial struggles for liberation and European’s desperate attempts to curtail them. If, as Todd Shepard suggests, metropolitan contemporaries reluctantly embraced a mythos of decolonization as the inevitable fulfillment of their republican ideals, then those colonies that disavowed independence would be seen as failures of the modernist project. As anthropologist Vanessa Agard-Jones observes in the French département d’outre-mer (DOM) of Martinique:

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68 While the Party for Freedom has been very explicit on this issue, Leftist parties are cautious to say that there is unlikely “a way to go back” and instead propose a model of transnational citizenship in which the Dutch unilaterally define the criteria based on models of democracy. See in particular GreenLeft member Ineke Van Gent—the leader of this effort in parliament—in a debate Tweede Kamer, January 15, 2010.

Martinicans continue to be understood as products of a kind of modernist failure, having not followed the standard postcolonial teleology to independence as did the majority of other territories of the global South. Locally, same-sex desiring and gender-transgressing people become subject to a culturalist agenda that rationalizes homophobia as an expression of cultural sovereignty and as a way to defend Martinican ‘local values’ against those of the French state. Indeed, similar defenses of cultural sovereignty have emerged throughout this study on the non-sovereign Dutch Caribbean.

Within this constellation of factors, Antillean Dutch face two equally undesirable options: refusing enduring ties with the Netherlands and, by extension, embracing the unwanted outcome of independence, or acquiescing to Dutch policies that continue to betray the Kingdom’s alleged commitment to equality by differentiating among Dutch citizens. In either scenario, the interests of European Dutch are privileged over those of Antilleans in the Kingdom. Thus, the impossible and inescapable binds that for Frantz Fanon characterized the “tragedy of the colonial situation” are again rehearsed in the postcolonial multinational state. And it is precisely these constraints that from 2007-2012 drove a wedge between the standpoints of sexual progressivism and anti-imperialism.

One wonders, however, whether the seeming incommensurability between sexual progressivism and cultural sovereignty in the non-self-governing world might be overcome by challenging interpretations of non-sovereignty as reactionary and anti-modern. Scholars of political relations within the Kingdom of the Netherlands such as Lammert de Jong and Gert

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70 Vanessa Agard-Jones, “What the Sands Remember,” *GLQ*, 327-28. Agard-Jones research on sexual politics in Martinique offers a close parallel to some of the issues raised in this chapter, however her project is less concerned with understanding how certain divisions become entrenched in political discourses and cultural sensibilities and focuses rather on how same-sex desiring individuals negotiate sexual and political identities in contemporary Martinique. See also “Le Jeu de Qui? Sexual Politics at Play in the French Caribbean,” *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies* 3 (2009): 1-19.

Oostindie have similarly argued that The Hague must invest in new notions of citizenship and forms of political integration in order to meet the exigencies of a multinational state. These scholars argue, in other words, that non-sovereignty should be recognized and dignified as a form of statehood both in formal constitutional relationships across the Kingdom and informally in order to engage in more enlightened popular and political debates.\footnote{See in particular Oostindie and Klinkers, Decolonising the Caribbean; Gedeeld Koninkrijk and Knellende Koninkrijksbanden, Oostindie, Postcolonial Netherlands: Sixty-five Years of Forgetting, Commemorating, Silencing (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011), de Jong, De Werkvloer van het Koninkrijk and eds. De Jong and Dirk Kruijt, Extended Statehood in the Caribbean. See also Armando Lampe, “The Recolonisation of Aruba,” in eds. Aarón Gamaliel Ramos and Angel Israel Rivera, Islands at the Crossroads: Politics in the Non-Independent Caribbean (Kingston: Ian Randle, 2001), 106-114.}

New questions thus emerge when we take seriously the multinational state as a unit of analysis—a polity whose history is no doubt shaped by colonialism but whose future, if such states are to succeed in meeting demands for freedom and equality, must not be overdetermined by its colonial inheritances. If we are to incorporate analyses of non-sovereignty into theories of empire and postcoloniality, the challenge will be to resist the temptation to view non-sovereign territories as legacies—or perhaps even extensions—of imperialism and to view them instead as potentially innovative political formations that disrupt conventional understandings of statehood and citizenship. Such an analysis must take into account the extremely uneven power relations evident within multinational or non-sovereign states like the Kingdom while also striving to theorize freedom and justice \textit{through} a commitment to non-national configurations. Looking to Aimé Césaire on Martinique, Gary Wilder has argued that actors pursuing integration into the French nation-state did not view their struggle as simply a means of bringing the benefits of citizenship to the colonies. Instead, incorporation might carry with it the radical potential to
transform the meaning of freedom and belonging in France, its former colonies, and throughout the postwar world.  

From the standpoint of the present, such a broad re-thinking of citizenship and belonging seems in many ways more urgent and yet simultaneously unreachable than ever before. The debate over same-sex marriage in the Dutch Caribbean offers a small but meaningful window into the seemingly intractable issue of equality in a context where histories of colonialism and revitalized (European) demands for national sovereignty have rendered incommensurable the goals of sexual progressivism and resistance to enduring forms of cultural domination. My interest here lies not in arguing that non-sovereignty is necessarily coercive or insidious with regards to matters of intimacy. Rather, I wish to argue that by situating sex and gender at the center of studies of non-sovereignty we can more fully understand how the boundaries of autonomy and integration are drawn, and how past and contemporary political relationships are negotiated. It is this combined impulse towards autonomy and integration—as Curaçaon activist Mario Kleinmoedig’s insightful comments remind us—that both forecloses and radically opens paths for winning and redefining rights in a transnational Kingdom.

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Conclusion

Sex and Sovereignty after Empire

Within the explanatory notes of the 1954 Charter of the Kingdom of the Netherlands lies a curious statement. It reads: “the Charter is not an eternal edict.”¹ Indeed, assertions about the ephemeral nature of laws and constitutions are rarely found in such historically significant documents. Still more surprising is that the Charter, despite its invitation to revise the trans-Atlantic ties binding the Kingdom, has proven more resilient and enduring than it has fragile or fleeting. As the chapters assembled here have explored, the bonds linking the European Netherlands to the Kingdom’s Caribbean territories have steadfastly strengthened from the announcement of imperial reform to the present day. Yet, as I have also argued, the process of forging steadily strengthening ties has not been without its share of conflict. Throughout the Kingdom’s postcolonial history, debates on topics ranging from household composition to family planning and sex work to same-sex marriage have invoked broader questions about the nature of trans-Atlantic ties. If sexual politics have served as a public venue for debating the Kingdom, they have also helped to shape important policies in the Netherlands and the Antilles that have drawn these Kingdom territories in ever-closer relation. In this way, the trajectory of decolonization in the Kingdom cannot be understood apart from often-tense discussions on gender, family and sexual politics.

¹ Ed., W. Richard Timmers, Statuut voor het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden, 1954, in Lexplicatie: De Complete Wetgeving Toegelicht, Statuut voor het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden (Deventer: Wolters Kluwer, 2009), 259. Oostindie has also reflected on this statement in “Het Statuut van het Koninkrijk is Geen Eeuwig Edict,” in eds., Peter Oosten de Boer and Hans van der Heuvel, Openbaar Bestuur, 1991-2005 (Alphen aan den Rijn: Kluwer, 2005): 135-146, in which Oostindie states that until the 1990s, Dutch politicians hoped that the Charter would gradually allow for Caribbean territories to move towards total independence. Oostindie suggests that the longevity of the document is owed more to the rigid protocols for revising it, which require unanimous agreement by all the partners, than with enthusiasm for the Charter per se.
Looking to the ways in which Kingdom ties touch the ground in the daily lives and intimate experiences of its residents on both sides of the Atlantic offers numerous insights for students of colonialism and decolonization. Foremost among them, the strengthening rather than severance of bonds between the Netherlands and the Antilles challenges the assumed trajectory of decolonization. Addressing David Scott’s provocation to “give up constructing an image of colonialism that demands from us an attitude of anticolonial longing,”¹ this dissertation has shown how some European and Antillean Dutch alike pursued closer collaboration with their Kingdom counterparts throughout the postcolonial period. The willingness to seek equality within the Kingdom rather than without, however, should not be read as an enduring accommodation of colonialism, nor should we interpret the maintenance of Kingdom ties as the outcome of a mild or benevolent form of colonialism. Those who have labored to transform the substance and meaning of abiding trans-Atlantic relations have grappled with the durability of racism and the tenacity of inequality. In the 1970s as in the last decade, Antillean Dutch activists have openly condemned the effects of colonialism while still imagining a future of multinational statehood wherein the even expansion of rights and privileges in the Kingdom could transform, in ways more thoroughgoing and sincere, social and economic relations across the Atlantic.

Negotiations on the precise meaning of equality in a multinational state have not only taken place in the halls of Parliament and in conversations among political elites and their radical opponents. At various points, these trans-Atlantic attachments have been embraced and challenged in protests against regulated prostitution, funding for family planning initiatives, and in academic studies of single mothers. While familiar characters such as politicians and revolutionaries have no doubt helped to shape the postcolonial Kingdom, “Closer Ties” has also

shown how other popular actors both nurtured and contested trans-Atlantic ties by entering the discursive terrain of gender, sexual and family politics. Oil companies, Catholic women’s groups, family planning experts, welfare providers and academic researchers, and feminists and LGBTQ rights groups have variously sought greater collaboration, intervention, or autonomy in the Kingdom. Their actions have critically helped to mobilize opinion for and against this commonwealth state. Focus on these dynamic processes of contestation and negotiation broaden scholarly view of the subjects and actors that decolonization is presumed to concern.

Considering alternative sites of struggle, including especially those over sexual freedoms, “Closer Ties” illuminates the varied locations and meaning of anti-imperial struggle itself. Although independence movements have emerged sporadically in the Antillean islands over the past seventy years, it is paradoxically in the European Netherlands and among European Dutch that the aspiration for independence enjoys a high degree of popular and political support. Recently, anti-immigrant populist parties have sought to extricate the Netherlands from the two supranational states to which it belongs: the European Union and the Kingdom of the Netherlands. But already in the 1970s, the progressive Labor government of Joop den Uyl struggled to conceive of progress beyond the nation-state model, and attempted to thrust independence on the Kingdom’s Caribbean territories. Dutch efforts to rouse rather than suppress the zeitgeist ideal of territorial sovereignty amongst its Caribbean partners have, to metropolitan chagrin, compelled only one exodus from the Kingdom in 1975, when Suriname accepted total independence.3

Yet, in the Kingdom, “independence” has not always been synonymous with the severance of ties between former metropole and colony. As this dissertation has shown, much of

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3 For the ambivalent acceptance of independence in Suriname see Meel, *Tussen Autonomie en Onafhankelijkheid*, and Oostindie and Klinkers, *Decolonising the Caribbean*. 
the drama in the Kingdom’s history lies in the islands’ relationships to each other. The popular maxim on Aruba in the 1940s, “Never under Willemstad, better a thousand times under The Hague,” captures the sense of frustration with Curaçao’s dominant political role in the Antillean constellation. Aruba’s appeal to separate from Curaçao finally succeeded in 1986 when Dutch politicians conceded to the decentralization of the Netherlands Antilles, stipulating that Aruba must accept total independence ten years later. In 1993, Aruban politicians amazingly managed to rescind this condition—and, with it, Dutch ambitions to shake off its imperial remnants in the Caribbean.

In the past fifteen years, inter-island antagonism intensified as the remaining Antillean islands complained of continued domination by Curaçao, which likewise resented its duty to look after the smaller islands. On the symbolically chosen date of 10 October 2010, the Netherlands Antilles ceased to exit, dissolving a state long accused of having only existed in the minds of Dutch bureaucrats. With the absorption of the BES islands into the Dutch state that year, the boundaries of the European Netherlands dramatically expanded. While I have argued that the physical boundaries of the Kingdom owe their shape to the mobilizing power of sexual politics, I have also argued that sexual politics have played a symbolic but no less profound role in demarcating the boundaries of social, cultural, and material belonging. With the unprecedented migration of growing numbers of Antillean Dutch to the Netherlands from the 1970s on, new schemes have arisen to solidify notions of difference among ostensibly equal Dutch citizens. The retrenchment of social welfare services in the Netherlands throughout the 1980s-1990s, and the differential allocation of welfare in the contemporary Dutch Caribbean municipalities, highlights the imbrication of the welfare state in broader postcolonial developments. This

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5 Oostindie, Paradise Overseas, 52.
version of empire’s dénouement places the drama of imperial dissolution in Europe itself, and bridges the only ostensible divide between the postwar and postcolonial period.

Recently, Ann Stoler has invited scholars of colonialism and its aftermaths to look beyond the static ruins of empire to active processes of “decimation, displacement, and reclamation” in order to better understand how the remains of imperial projects continue to exert force in our present, engendering and revitalizing disparities.6 Engaging the temporal ingenuity of Derek Walcott’s poetry, which slips between a past tense of bygone colonialism to its present areas of abandonment, Stoler asks, what is the “rot that remains” when the men are gone?7 In ways both predictable and obvious, the colonial past looms large in the non-sovereign world, places that are often ambiguously integrated into former metropolitan states. In the Dutch Caribbean, the unbroken attachments of empire allow for an easy and immediate recognition of a colonial past, found in the recent gentrification of colonial neighborhoods or the aging colonial-era oil refineries that blight the landscapes of both Aruba and Curaçao. Likewise, evidence of this continued relationship saturates the institutions that govern the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Unlike other regimes, however, the architects of these systems concede that this negotiation between autonomy and integration is a permanent and foundational aspect of political life and social realities.

At various points throughout this study, European Dutch politicians and their supporters have abruptly retreated from the mandate to treat all Kingdom territories equally. Whether in the sudden withdrawal of Dutch funding for family planning campaigns after the Trinta di Mei revolt in 1969, or in the repeal of the National Assistance Act and social services for single mothers in the 1990s, European Dutch politicians have repeatedly leveraged the nationalization of welfare

7 Ibid., 2-3. Stoler draws this question from Derek Walcott’s poem “Ruins of a Great House.”
and aid as punishment for daring to imagine futures beyond the nation-state. This dismissive posturing enables European Dutch to counter Antillean grievances by claiming that Antillean Dutch need not remain in a Kingdom that treats them unfairly, obviating a serious engagement with the meaning of multinational citizenship.

What, then, is the rot that remains where the men never leave? In Dutch debates, the past that overdetermines this question is not so much a colonial one. Rather, it is the recursive assumption about decolonization – about how empires were alleged to have ended – that expands and invests in certain notions of rights as it legitimizes the circumvention of others. In other words, if we understand decolonization culminating in territorial sovereignty not as an unfinished project in the non-sovereign world but as a historical sensibility that limits freedoms to and frames political rights around the nation-state and national community, we can gain new insights into the elusiveness of equality in a commonwealth Kingdom. The unfulfilled goal of equality, however, should not be grounds for dissolving the Kingdom. Rather, it should compel European and Antillean Dutch to take the Kingdom—and the unique path to decolonization pursued within its borders—ever more seriously.

Making a contribution toward this effort, “Closer Ties” has considered debates on sexual politics as sites where the Kingdom is lived, experienced, and contested. While sexual politics mobilize publics beyond the former colonial world, I argue that these debates recur in the Kingdom not simply because issues of morality are personal and sensitive. Rather, if we accept that colonialism was so saturated by concerns about sexuality, then we must also consider how sexuality would stand at the center of its undoing. In the Kingdom as in other post-slavery societies, the stereotypes of black sexual irresponsibility that once underpinned justifications for colonialism and slavery have had a long and pernicious afterlife. In the Kingdom, these
stereotypes rationalized renewed intervention in the intimate lives of Antilleans at the moment of
decolonization and resurfaced in debates over family planning, immigration and welfare in
subsequent decades. Yet, it is also important to remember that sexual politics have not only
served as a technology for domination in the Kingdom. Arguments for enhanced sexual
freedoms have likewise entered the political programs and demands of Antilleans pursuing
emancipation within the Kingdom, just as these struggles have brought together some European
and Antillean Dutch in closer contact and collaboration. That the conflicts of the postcolonial
period have been profoundly saturated by anxieties around appropriate gender roles, conjugal
norms, and household organization reconceives the very substance of imperial dissolution, and
draws attention to the overlapping personal and political experiences of decolonization. The
Kingdom, with its lingering trans-Atlantic attachments, offers us a way to appraise the aftermath
of empire’s intimate entanglements.
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