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AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING THE SOCIAL LIFE OF FEMALE, BRITISH CARIBBEAN, IMMIGRANT DOMESTIC WORKERS IN TWENTIETH CENTURY CURAÇAO: CONTROLLING SEXUAL MORALITY

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Introduction
The establishment of an oil refinery in Curaçao in the early 20th century drastically changed the economic structure, demographic composition, and demand for labor on the island. Labor migration into Curaçao involved both men and women, making it an interesting case for studying Caribbean migration from a gender perspective. Although labor migration is often seen as solely a male endeavor, increasingly, migration studies include women’s involvement, problematizing and contesting the idea of migration patterns based solely on male labor. Although this new, gendered approach to migration is admittedly shaped by the global concern with present-day migratory movements in which women participate in large numbers, studies are now also focusing on women’s migration in the past. Women, gender and labour migration: historical and global perspectives (Sharpe, 2001), which is a collection of gender-specific historical studies of migration in the 19th and early 20th centuries, shows that women have long been involved in long-distance labor migration. In the introduction, Pamela Sharpe describes the Caribbean as a region in which migration has been male-dominated in contrast to Latin America where it has been more female-dominated. This finding, however, is based on migration to Europe and the USA only, while intra-regional migration within the Caribbean is overlooked. In the report of the UN Expert Group Meeting on international migration and development in Latin America and the Caribbean (2005), intra-Caribbean migration is recognized, but as something occurring from the mid-20th century onwards, thereby neglecting such migration in the first half of the 20th century.

1 This article is part of an ongoing study that examines intra-Caribbean migratory movements of women and men from the former British Caribbean colonies to the Dutch Caribbean island of Curaçao in the twentieth century.
A key characteristic of British West Indian immigration to Curaçao in the 20th century was the comparatively large number of women who came to work in domestic service roles in households in Curaçao. Also worth mentioning is that these British Caribbean women, who had started to arrive in Curaçao as domestic workers especially in the 1940s, continued to come to the island when the oil refining sector declined in the 1950s. In contrast, most male immigrants lost their jobs and returned to their countries of origin. Consequently, in the 1960s the number of women in Curaçao from the British Caribbean exceeded that of their male counterparts: 2,914 to 2,281 (Census, 1960: 15; Allen, 2015). In the 1960 census, British West Indian citizens were placed together with people of the French Caribbean, but who were present in small number on the island. More international studies now show that gendered differences have an impact on migration behavior, and that these differences are furthermore shaped by the social and cultural contexts of the host society. This case study of gender analysis of migration in Curaçao contributes to understanding how gender has interacted with migration in the Caribbean. It demonstrates how, there was an urge to regulate gender and sexuality in Curaçao which focused on women’s morality in general and resulted in the policing of immigrant women’s behavior in particular. I would like to spotlight these Caribbean women immigrants in Curaçao and especially the interplay between their presence and certain behaviors promoted as morally correct in the receiving society. The migration of British West Indian women to Curaçao in the 20th century fits the well-known phenomenon of poor (often black) migrant women who worked as help and caregivers for elite (often white) families. As such, it connects gender to class, race and ethnicity and demands an intersectional approach. In this article, I use gender as a connecting factor to look at the intersections of migration, class, sexual morality, citizenship, and other cultural aspects and through this perspective, I consider the social situations which these intersections produced.

Intersectionality in the study of migration examines the dynamic interplay between competing meanings of migration experiences in a society by looking at the interconnectedness of age, gender, sexuality, social class, religion, ethnicity, and race. Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge state in their book *Intersectionality* (2016) that intersectionality is a way of analyzing and understanding the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences. It emanates from the idea that people’s lives, social inequality, and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race, gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other. Intersectionality as an analytical tool gives people better access to the complexity of the world and of themselves. Using intersectionality as an analytical tool in the present study enables analysis of how the migrant status of the British Caribbean domestic servants in Curaçao has been shaped along the axes of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and class.
The “domestic servant problematique” in Curaçao

Female domestic labor immigration to Curaçao is socio-historically interrelated to the domestic work which has been performed for centuries by local Curaçaoan women. Women in Curaçao often worked as domestic servants. Jeroen Dekker’s overview in Curaçao zonder/met Shell (1982) points out that between 1900 and 1929, i.e. just before and just after the establishment of the oil refinery, the number of women working as domestic servants in Curaçao was still relatively large. An interesting note is that a distinction was made between domestic servants, washer women, and cooks because women in the last two occupations earned higher wages than those in domestic work (Dekker, 1982: 158). Depending on how wealthy families were or how much they wanted to employ domestic workers as an aspirational status symbol, they employed a woman in each of the separate forms of domestic help. In 1931, nearly 70 years after the abolition of slavery (1863), domestic service remained one of the few options open to women of the non-properitied classes. Data from the Colonial Report covering 1931 shows that the number of domestic workers in Curaçao was 1,927, which was second only to the 5,038 people employed as hat weavers. Interestingly, of the 1,210 people doing office work, only 200 were women (De Banier: Staatkundig Gereformeerd Dagblad, 23 May 1932).

In Curaçao, a domestic worker is called a kriá di kas, which literally translates as “raiser of the house” and implies the title of a person who both keeps house and raises the people of the home, a term that suggests a close support function within the household. Nevertheless, oral historical data from the beginning of the 20th century shows that it was not a category of work that women of the non-properitied classes considered desirable. In my recent article Struggling for survival: the female face of the early twentieth century labour migration from the English-speaking Caribbean to Curaçao (2016), I explained that after the Abolition of slavery in Curaçao in 1863, domestic work remained stigmatized because of the poorly regulated, harsh labour conditions in which women had to work. Parents generally preferred their daughters to learn to do other work, like sewing, so that they could be more autonomous. Furthermore, workers were vulnerable to sexual harassment by their employers and/or the sons of the employers. The Roman Catholic Church, which in those days pastored especially to the African descended working-class population, warned against the numerous cases of young girls being sexually harassed in the workplace. They were also concerned that girls from the countryside who went to work as domestic servants in town could be tempted by the “loose way of life” that prevailed there (Allen, 2016).

With the establishment of the oil refinery on the island in 1915, there was an increase in households, in particular of Dutch expatriates with a high socioeconomic position, and this raised the demand for domestic servants. By the 1930s, the lack of domestic servants had become acute. Newspapers of the time dedicated much attention to what
was labeled “the domestic servant problematique” and analysis of contemporary news articles provide some insight into the way in which working-class women played out their position and navigated within the limits of their relative power. The contradiction between the condescending attitude of local people towards domestic service and the growing demand for such service is clearly revealed in a Dutch newspaper article of 1937 which stated that while there is a desperate need for domestic servants, many young local girls who could have worked as domestic servants preferred to remain unemployed (Het Vaderland: Staat- en Letterkundig Nieuwsblad, 6 December 1937).

Many attempts had been made to make domestic work seem more appealing. For example, in 1918 a Labor Exchange (Arbeidsbeurs) was opened to present employment opportunities to women and girls, while providing “ladies with good servants” (De Curaçaoesche Courant, July 5, 1918, letter to the editor). Later, the possibility of introducing a school program was discussed, which would teach girls not only how to clean a house, but also how to serve, and how to answer their employer when asked a question (Amigoe, 14 November 1941). In an attempt to raise the prestige of domestic work, it was also claimed that Curaçaoan women used to consider it an honor to be a domestic servant and that Curaçaoan domestic servants had even gone to work in the Dutch colony of Suriname, where they had gained a good reputation (Amigoe, 7 December 1944). Attempts to make domestic work more appealing to locals are attested to by observations by public figures such as Pedro Pablo Medardo de Marchena (1899-1968) who wrote for the magazine De Onpartijdige and was a fervent critic of the Dutch colonial government and the Roman Catholic mission. In one of his articles published in 1933, he described the disadvantaged position of women, particularly domestic servants and shop assistants, which he believed was caused by the poor education that girls received in local schools (De Marchena, 1933 quoted in Broek, 2018). Yet, despite these efforts, continued low status perpetuated continued low wages. For example, one informant, born in 1920 on the plantation Savonet in Banda Bou and who started to work at the age of eighteen as a domestic servant in Otrabanda, Willemstad, related that she was paid only 15 guilders a month for her work (Interview Allen and Maduro, 16 October 2007).

In 1940, limited attempts to improve the status of domestic workers were enacted in the Civil Code under the heading “From hiring of servants and labourers” (1940, Lvo. tot wijziging en aanvulling van het B.W. Omtrent huur van dienstboden en werklieden. See also 1940, 126 Wijziging: 1940, 151). Notwithstanding, in 1969 the magazine Vitó (edited by Stanley Brown and others) described the growing discontent among domestic workers and proposed a labour union for domestic servants to deal with the many atrocities within the sector of domestic service. In the 1980s, both foreign and local domestic

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2 Because of his riotous publications, Pedro Pablo Medardo de Marchena was banished from Curaçao and imprisoned on the neighbouring Dutch Caribbean island of Bonaire during World War II.
servants became the focal groups of emergent womens’ organisations (*Amigoe*, 8 April 1983).

During the domestic servant problematique predominant in the period of end of the 1930s and 1940s, Curaçaoan women began to make use of the local shortage of domestic workers to demand higher pay for their work. As covered in a 1937 newspaper article, the high demand versus the small supply of domestic labor had indeed led to an increase in the domestic servant’s wage (*Het Vaderland: Staat- en Letterkundig Nieuwsblad*, 6 December 1937). A few years later, the author of a magazine article even complained that the wage level for domestic servants was increasing “disproportionately” as employers were desperately looking for servants, even to the point of stealing away servants from others (M.P. Gorsira in a magazine of November 1944, as cited in the *Amigoe* of December 4, 1944). This same author also indicated that domestic servants were earning 30 to 35 guilders per month at that time. With a domestic servant’s board and lodging included, her wage could be estimated at about 100 guilders per month (*Amigoe*, December 4, 1944), which was much more than the 15 guilders previously indicated that one domestic worker was earning at the beginning of the 20th century. Demanding higher pay also meant demanding more respect for domestic service, an insistence that was strengthened by the high demand for this category of work and the fear among housewives of being left without a domestic servant (*Amigoe*, December 4, 1944).

Before the arrival of immigrant women from the British West Indies in the 1940s, domestic servants had already been introduced from other locations such as the Dutch Caribbean island of St. Eustatius (*Het Vaderland: Staat- en Letterkundig Nieuwsblad*, 15 June 1926). When the shortage of domestic servants became more pronounced, some attempts were made to attract workers from Suriname. In 1937, the managing board of Curaçao’s oil company sent out a circular to the company’s Surinamese expatriate staff to encourage Surinamese maids to come to Curaçao.

This was also reported in a Surinamese newspaper called *De West: Nieuwsblad uit en voor Suriname* of the third of December 1937 under the title *Surinaamse dienstmeisjes naar Curacao?* (Surinamese domestic servants to Curacao?) Subsequently, an article in another Surinamese newspaper (1937) under the same title cautioned Suriname ladies against going to Curaçao, stressing that even though the monthly wage there was twice as high as in Suriname, it was not accepted by Curaçaoan women, confirming that local women were demanding higher pay (*De Surinamer: Nieuws en Advertentieblad*, 19 December 1937). In 1939, the government of Curaçao cautiously gave permission to admit 25 Surinamese women to the island as domestic workers (Philipps, 1988: 28-30). Sourcing domestic workers from Suriname did not last long however as British West Indians replaced Surinamese workers from the 1940s onward (Philipps, 1988: 28-30). The desperate economic situation on many Caribbean islands at that time, due to the decline of
the sugar industry, motivated many women to leave their home countries – which the British politician Lloyd George (1863-1945) had called the “slums of empire” – and to emigrate to Curaçao on their own to become domestic workers (Singh, 2004: 216). Many British West Indian women who chose to migrate were single mothers who left their children in the care of a friend or relative. Some of them already had some migration experience and came to Curaçao via the Dominican Republic. They came to Curaçao to do domestic work and to support their families in their country of origin by sending back money and goods. In that way, they took control of their lives and manifested autonomous behavior. Such behaviours can be seen as an early example of the modern-day phenomenon of women engaging independently in migration in search of work. It should be noted that although there were some British West Indian women who came to join their husbands already in Curaçao as labor immigrants, their number was small as the oil refinery preferred to employ younger unmarried men. By the mid-20th century, the number of English-speaking domestic servants had grown and the demographic statistics of Curaçao show that on January 1, 1953, 80 percent of the 1,727 single foreign domestic workers who were registered with the Immigration Office came from a variety of places in the Anglophone Caribbean, including Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, Anguilla, Montserrat, St. Kitts and Nevis, Dominica, Antigua, Grenada, St. Vincent, Tortola, St. Lucia, Jamaica, and British Guyana (lecture by the Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce, 1953; Philipps 1988: 40).

One can conclude that women from the British West Indies were brought in to take over the bulk of the available domestic work in Curaçao and to maintain the prevailing exploitative conditions. Their introduction into the society added the complexity of intersections between gender, class and race. Gender- motivated inequality and other social inequalities within the colonial power structure in Curaçao were reinforced as these immigrant women from the British West Indies came to occupy a lower/working class position. Their introduction also raises the question of how one should understand the social position of the Surinamese women, who were only temporarily brought in as domestic workers in the late 1930s.

The challenge posed to local norms of sexual morality

It is noticeable that even though the local demand for domestic workers was much greater than the supply and increased over the years, it was only after 1938 that the Dutch colonial government in Curaçao became less reluctant to allow the entry of single female workers to the island (Philipps, 1988: 28). Government officials seemed to have been concerned that they would have little control over foreign, young and single

3 Perhaps they managed in this way to escape the brutal dictatorship of General Rafael Leónidas Trujillo, who was President of the Dominican Republic from 1930 to 1938 and again from 1942 to 1952.
women on the island who could be harmful to public morality. This fear seems to be confirmed by an article in a Surinamese newspaper, commenting on the possible presence of young Surinamese ladies in Curaçao: “It is not desirable, for entirely self-reliant in their free time, they will still need some relaxation and scattering, which is not easy to find for the girl here” (De West; Nieuwsblad uit Suriname, 3 December 1937).

In the migration of domestic servants, age became a crucial factor in the opportunity for work, adding to another intersectional axis of inequality. The age requirement for admittance in the 1940s was at least 21 years and not more than 50 years of age for English-speaking domestic servants. In the 1950s, the requirement was added that they should prove through an official document that they were unmarried, as in the past married women had sometimes migrated and left husbands and children behind. (Philipps 1988: 35, 36). This means that the attitude in Curaçao was contradictory. Government officials in Curaçao saw unmarried immigrant women as a threat to local morality, yet at the same time, being unmarried was a requirement for admission to Curaçao as a domestic worker.

With the arrival of young, unmarried women, a discussion surfaced in Curaçao on issues related to sexual morality and respectability. These women came into a society in which gender roles were sharply divided. This division is clearly described by Clendon Hayes Mason, a St. Lucian studying Social Work who had been employed in the human resources department of Curaçao’s oil company, in his thesis titled The Greatest of These (1958). In his description of the situation of the English-speaking workers at the oil refinery, Mason gives a glimpse of Curaçaoan society through the eyes of an immigrant. His chapter on the customs and mores of Curaçao contains much information on gender relations and gives some indication of how men and women interacted with each other and of the importance to Curaçaoan women of living up to the prevailing norms of femininity and respectability. Mason describes female and male behavior during dance parties – perhaps one of the few opportunities that he had as an immigrant to learn about the customs of the local population. Qualified by him as Spanish customs, he states that men and women did not easily mingle. During a dance party, the women would sit in the dance room and when the music started, the men would approach them and ask them for a dance. When the dance was over, they returned to their respective seats. There was very little intermingling; the men would not stay to talk to the women between dances and they would not go together to some other room to indulge in even the most harmless of platitudes (p.20). Mason writes that the women were well chaperoned and that the chaperones took a position in the room which provided a good vantage point for careful vigilance. Although married women were not chaperoned, if a man wanted to dance with a married woman, he had to first seek the permission of her husband (p.20).

Mason’s observations about gender relations in mid-20th century Curaçao correspond with what others have written about the ideal, respectable Curaçaoan woman who should be innocent, chaste, a virgin before marriage, obedient and submissive (Allen,
He also states that this ideology prevailed mostly among lower and lower-middle class families. Yet it did not exist to such an extent among the higher classes as they had traveled extensively to the USA, Canada and Europe and had been influenced by the customs there (1958). However, Mason’s description of male-female relationships is contradicted by the vivid description of social life in Willemstad in the 1940s in Seis aña kaska bërdè (2010), a memoir by the well-known Curaçaoan author and cultural activist Pierre Lauffer (Curaçao, 1920-1981). This memoir contains short stories about Lauffer’s time as a military police officer between 1939 and 1945 and describes his participation in local events that reflected less rigid divisions between men and women than Mason described.

Government officials in Curaçao tried to dictate certain behaviours among the British West Indian women by establishing rules and regulations related to moral behavior. One of these rules required them to live in their employer’s household. These employers were principally the Dutch staff of the oil company, but also members of the traditional Jewish commercial elite, as well as Surinamese and Lebanese families of high standing (Philipps, 1988: 105). Consequently, these women became known locally by the generic name of ‘sleep-in’ (i.e. live-in) maids. An exception was made for a woman whose father worked on the island as she could stay at her father’s home (Philipps, 1988: 36). Confined within the walls of the homes of their employers, the immigrant domestic workers cleaned, did the laundry, cooked, and/or provided childcare. They were an indispensable part of the household but were locked in a vulnerable and subservient position. A number of immigrant women from the British West Indies were interviewed in the 1980s by the historian Ann Philipps (and afterwards also by myself) and these interviews revealed numerous exploitative situations (Philipps, 1988; Allen, 2016).

Church attendance was also a factor ironically affecting local people’s perceptions of domestic workers’ morality. Once every two weeks domestic servants would get an afternoon and a weekend off, which they could use to attend to their personal affairs. In their free time, they had some opportunity to develop relationships with friends, for example by going to church and/or parties. Church activities got them out of social isolation and gave them some relief as they found solidarity with other women in a similar position. (Allen, 2016). However, as most of them were Protestant, church attendance lead to antagonistic situations in a society that predominantly identified as Roman Catholic (Groenewoud, 2017). As a result of religious differences, both male and female migrant workers, were marginalized and depicted as agents of Satan (Allen, 2013).

Some government regulations were aimed at controlling the sexual activity of migrant domestic workers. For example, pregnancy or living in concubinage was used as a reason for deportation to the home country (Philipps, 1988: 37; 1992: 105). In the beginning, women faced immediate deportation in the event of pregnancy and could never re-enter the country. But in the 1950s, the latter prohibition was dropped; women could
go to their country of origin to deliver their child and then return to Curaçao (Philipps, 1992: 104; Allen, 2016). Perhaps the regulation against pregnancy and concubinage was motivated by popular opinions illustrated in sources such as the article in a local newspaper dated October 21, 1939, under the heading Zuigelingzorg (Infant care), that linked the high mortality rate of very young children on the island to women who had come (in particular) from the British West Indies to work as domestic servants. According to the article, they bore children out of wedlock and left these children in the care of strangers or left them to fend for themselves, because they did not have relatives in Curaçao who could look after their newborn children. This article continues by stating that any of these children were admitted to hospital with serious burns and fractures (Amigoe di Curaçao, October 21, 1939). In addition to articulating popular opinions about infant neglect and abuse, this article provides some indication that there was already a notable presence of British West Indian women in Curaçao before 1939 and their behavior was already characterized as immoral.

The regulation that prohibited immigrant women from becoming pregnant while employed was an attempt to police their sexual behavior and reflected a prejudiced ideology. There are no data available as to how many women became pregnant and how many terminated their pregnancies to avoid deportation. Yet it was well known that in certain neighbourhoods where immigrant women stayed on their days off, there were people specialized in helping to “throw away the belly” (i.e., abort) (Interview Allen, 2017). The regulation may have been justified by moral arguments, but the enforcement of it was open to abuse. According to some women, the prohibition against pregnancy was used as a threat against domestic workers by women who would lie to the Curaçaan immigration authorities, claiming that a domestic worker was pregnant so that she would have to be deported. Deportation as a result of alleged pregnancy was also the case when an employer, for some reason, did not want the services of a particular woman anymore.

The fact that pregnancies occurred can be deduced from references in popular discourse. For example, the author Pierre Lauffer refers in his prose and poetry collection Raspá to a situation in which a domestic servant from St. Kitts had become pregnant by her employer and who was therefore deported from the island (1962; 2006). Another example is the following anecdote in a recent Kittitian newspaper:

If you ask around, you would be told that when girls left here to travel to Curaçao and Aruba as domestic servants, if they get pregnant, they would be sent back home. The desperate mother would seek help from Sweet Garboly, who would concoct a dumpling. The mother would post the dumpling by boat. On arrival in Curacao, the dumpling will still be hot, given to the male and marriage will take place (The Labour Spokesman, August 30, 2013, p.15).

The anecdote, in which supernatural power was referred to, might seem funny, but it indicates that these women also hoped to attain respectability and perhaps also financial
security through marriage and that becoming pregnant as an unmarried person, was not something that they desired.

It should be noted that while these immigrant women were expected to refrain from sexual activity, legislation was introduced in Curaçao to accommodate the sexual behavior of immigrant and other men on the island. In 1949, a group composed of the Chief of Police, the Dutch Minister of Health, representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, and the head of the United States military forces on the island agreed to set up a brothel called Campo Alegre to serve Dutch marines, US soldiers and seamen, and local oil-company workers (Kleijn & Schrover, 2013: 33). It was estimated that at that time about 8,500 sexually active single men lived on the island, and every month this figure was augmented by about 20,000 seafaring men who would dock in Curaçao and potentially engage in sexual activities (2013: 33). Attention to the phenomenon of prostitution on the island and to the potential dangers of sexually transmitted diseases started to grow during the 1940s. Yet, even in 1930, the Government introduced a regulation in which foreign nationals were asked to present proof of morality. In that way, government officials tried to prevent “prostitutes, traders in pornographic writings and such, pimps, tradesmen in women and girls” from entering the country (Nieuwsblad van het Noorden, 3 December 1930, Provinciale Geldersche en Nijmeegsche Courant, 2 December 1930). In most of the local discourse of that time, women from neighbouring countries who came to the island to work as prostitutes were singled out as agents of moral decay and a threat to the local society. A newspaper article from 1954 also links the presence and living patterns of British Caribbean domestic servants to moral decay and prostitution. The article claims that the so-called moral decay in Curaçao was influenced by the fact that a number of admitted foreign domestic servants no longer lived with their employers, but on their own, which gave rise to the suspicion that the growing demand for prostitution could be met through these women (Amigoe, 29 March 1954).

In addition to the intersecting forces of gender, class and sexual morality that had an impact on the living conditions of British West Indian domestic workers in Curaçao, citizenship/nationality also influenced their status and behaviours. According to Peter van der Veer (1995: 15), migration often generates nationalism, because “nationalism needs the story of migration, the diaspora of others, to establish the rootedness of the nation.” Migration confronts people immediately with the questions of who belongs, who does not, and what efforts ought to be undertaken to belong. This was also the context for the British West Indian migrants (Allen, 2013). In 1943, a law was passed in the British colonies stipulating that children born in a non-British territory to unwed mothers who had migrated from that territory would not be granted the nationality of their mother. It should also be noted that the decision in Curaçao to prohibit immigrant domestic workers from becoming pregnant on the island was in part motivated by the
desire to ensure that they would not bear children who would obtain the Dutch nationality. The status of immigrant women in Curaçao was further complicated in 1966 by the Ordinance regarding Admission and Expulsion (P.B. 1966 No. 17) which defined the conditions that foreigners must meet in order to be lawfully admitted to Curaçao (Philipps, 1992: 104; De Bruin & Groot, 2014: 28). This ordinance gave provisions for some women who became pregnant in Curaçao to breach their work contracts and deliver their child on the island, with all children born on the island being granted Dutch nationality. This reinforced antagonistic feelings concerning citizenship and identity, as exemplified in a speech made in 1979 by the departing president of the Union of Pensioners of the Netherlands Antilles, who complained that, in Curaçao, the children of women from the British islands had the privilege of being Dutch citizens, even though their mother was not born in Curaçao and their father was not even known (Amigoe, 28 December 1979, Aandacht voor vergeten gepensioneerden [Attention for forgotten pensioners]). These expressions voiced common concerns and prejudices connected with the relationship between gender, migration, citizenship and nationalism.

Race and ethnicity was also an intersectional factor that affected the social position of immigrant domestic workers. Racial stereotyping of physical appearance and racially-determined status were the norm in early 20th century Curaçao, as mentioned in writings of that time, such as De Marchena (1929), Willem Kroon (1933), Jose Anthonia (1949) and analyzed in recent studies by Margo Groenewoud (2017) and Angela Roe (2016). Race played a significant role in determining the social status of both male and female immigrants from the British Caribbean. This is reflected in frequent references to the skin color of British West Indian women; several newspaper articles from that period refer to their skin color to accentuate that they were of African descent “even though” they spoke English (Amigoe, 1941; Amigoe, 1971; Allen, 2013). In fact, neither their Caribbean variety of English nor their English-lexifier Creole was considered “proper English” and was used to argue that they were not completely British. In this way, language too was an important marker of difference in relation to migration and added to the variety of intersections affecting social inequality. The language barrier made it more difficult for migrant workers to make contact with the local population as they often could not speak Papiamentu (the creole spoken by the majority of Curaçaanoans and Afro-Curaçaoans in particular). Furthermore, as live-in domestic servants employed mostly by Dutch-speaking elite families, they had little opportunity to learn and practice Papiamentu.

Conclusion
The incorporation of British West Indian women as domestic servants in Curaçaan society provides some indication of how gender may intersect with sexuality, class, citizenship and race, and how all these affect the ways in which both women and men
position themselves and interrelate in a society. Through an intersectional approach, I have looked at the complex axes of power affecting the status of female, British West Indian immigrant domestic servants in Curaçaoan society in the 20th century. I have tried to expose the different ways in which factors such as gender, sexuality, class, age, citizenship and race as well as religion and language intersected and impacted the status and behaviours of these women.

The women who are the subject of the present study started arriving at a period when local Curaçaoan domestic servants were in the process of negotiating their own position by demanding increased payment and respect. However, the conflicts between local and migrant domestic workers show how class and economic power differences might have inhibited female solidarity and limited gains. Furthermore, female, British Caribbean, immigrant domestic servants arrived in a Curaçaoan society which was racially segmented and was struggling with changing norms and values regarding male-female relations. These unmarried women were seen as presenting a challenge to locally championed norms of sexuality and respectability, and as a consequence, Curaçaoan officials attempted to control their sexual behavior through restrictive regulations concerning residence (sleeping in), relationships (concubinage), and reproduction (pregnancy).

The 20th century migration of English-speaking Caribbean women to Curaçao has helped to add complexity to the ethnic diversity of Curaçao’s society. The enterprises and households that employed these immigrants established, enforced, and/or perpetuated certain gender, class and color distinctions and inequalities as well as norms related to sexual morality and respectability. Curaçao’s particular historical experience with immigration from the English-speaking Caribbean may, upon critical reflection, provide useful insights for dealing with current and new waves of transnational migrants. The present study confirms that accommodation between locals and immigrants is affected by a range of polemic social, moral, and cultural factors that can be manipulated to perpetuate conflict and maintain subservience. It also serves to illustrate that solidarity among working populations is not easy and takes time, even when these groups are similar in terms of ethnic and cultural background.

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