THE DUTCH CARIBBEAN IN THE 1990s:
Decolonization, recolonization?

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1. Introduction*

Caribbean decolonization has been a discontinuous process. It started as early as the late eighteenth century and is still underway today. Whereas relatively big and populated countries such as Haiti and the former Spanish colonies severed their ties with Europe rather early, decolonization - in various forms - of the smaller British, French and Dutch colonies dates of the post-War period only. Starting with Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago in 1962, most of the British West Indies opted for full independence. So did Suriname (formerly, Dutch Guiana) in 1975. On attaining independence, these countries ostensibly joined the ranks of completely decolonized countries, belatedly following the regional examples of the U.S., Haiti, the Latin tierra firme, the Dominican Republic, and Cuba, respectively. In contrast, small remnants of the former European empires did not take the final steps, if any at all. Thus decolonization halted in an apparent half-house in several cases: the French Departements d'Outre-Mer (DOMs, 1946), Puerto Rico's status as an Estado Libre Asociado (1952), the six Netherlands Antillean islands (the Statuut or Charter of 1954), and the five remaining British dependent territories.

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With respect to post-War Caribbean decolonization, the results of the dominant variant - the one leading to full independence - have been mixed at best. In addition to the standard problems facing all developing countries, the new Caribbean states faced the critical issues of scale and a virtual hemorrhage due to emigration. Passing these tests has proved extremely difficult. A conclusion may be that small scale and emigration have proved to be major stumbling blocks for the newly independent Caribbean micro-states, threatening to erode their economic, social and political potential.

An awareness of these issues has motivated some of the remaining dependent and associated territories to refrain from full independence altogether. By the early 1990s, some 14% of all Caribbean people were living in associated states and dependencies.\(^1\) Generally, their standard of living was far above the regional average. So was the political stability in their countries. Small wonder, then, the call for full independence is not a crucial issue in these territories. As Anthony Maingot acutely remarked, independence has proved to be a precious commodity in the Caribbean.\(^2\) In view of this sobering reality, concepts of decolonization and independence lost much of their previous ideological significance. Today, it is no longer taboo to question full independence as the inevitable outcome of decolonization.

The case of the former Dutch Caribbean may be enlightening in this respect. In this paper, I compare decolonization experiences as well as prospects for the 1990s of Suriname and the former Netherlands Antilles.\(^3\) Both countries were Dutch colonies until 1954. In that year, the Statuut or Charter of the Kingdom was promulgated. The Statuut served as a constitution for a Kingdom consisting of three partners, each autonomous in

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1. - 14%, that is, of a total population of 32,5 million people. The Puerto Rican population alone accounts for 10%, whereas the remaining 4% is the proportion of inhabitants of the French Départements d'Outre-Mer, the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba, and the British dependent territories taken together. Figures taken from Knight 1990:371.

2. - Lecture given at the University of the Netherlands Antilles, 15 November, 1990. See also Maingot 1991.

3. - The section on Suriname borrows from an article by my former colleague Peter Meel (Meel 1990b). The section on the Netherlands Antilles departs from an article published by another colleague at the Royal Institute of Linguistics and Anthropology, Rosemarijn Hoette, and myself (Hoette & Oostindie 1991). Obviously, responsibility for all errors and misinterpretations in the present paper is mine only. Recommended recent publications on the Dutch Caribbean are srana-shute 1990 and Sedoc-Dahlberg 1990.
internal affairs: the Netherlands, Suriname, and the Netherlands Antilles. Only defense, international relations and a mutual guarantee for democracy and 'decent government' were defined as Kingdom matters, and as such for all practical purposes were to be dominated by the Dutch administration ⁴.

The two Caribbean states within the Kingdom were - and are - microstates by most measures. Suriname has less than 400,000 inhabitants, the six Antillean islands have some 260,000. Suriname has a large territory, but most of this remains unexplored and hardly accessible. The islands are teeny. Both countries, though well-off (the Antilles) or at least not too bad-off (present-day Suriname) by Caribbean standards, traditionally have had highly dependent, vulnerable and unbalanced economies. From the early 1970s to the late 1980s, successive Dutch cabinets of various political orientations have worked hard to dismantle these two remnants of a once impressive empire. Looking back, we find that nothing turned out as the Dutch had expected and hoped for. Suriname accepted independence, including a golden handshake in 1975; yet the post-independence history of this Dutch-fabricated, extremely pluralistic society has been far from encouraging. For the Netherlands Antilles, the Dutch insisted on independence and against centrifugal tendencies that might lead to a break-up of the six-island state. Today, the Dutch accept that the former Netherlands Antilles will not become independent for an indefinite period. Moreover, it is probable that the former unitary state of six islands will eventually split into at least three independent entities. Despite independence, Suriname continues to look towards the Netherlands as perhaps a perpetrator of its present distress but also as its most likely partner in efforts to overcome its grave crisis. With independence postponed indefinitely and the formulation of a new constitution of the Kingdom underway, the orientation of the Dutch Caribbean islands to the metropolis is even more acute. Therefore, contrary to the expectations of several decades of decolonization policies and relatively massive development aid, the Dutch in the early 1990s still find themselves firmly entrenched - or 'trapped' - in the Caribbean.

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⁴ - Today, the Statuut serves as the constitution for a Kingdom of three partners, namely the Netherlands, the Netherlands Antilles-of-five, and Aruba. See below, and Hoefte & Oostindie 1991: 73-74.
2. Suriname: a tragic republic

In 1975, the Netherlands (formally: the Kingdom of the Netherlands) granted independence to Suriname. At the time, only a bare majority in the Suriname parliament supported independence, and opposition figures suggested that a majority of the Suriname population sided against independence. Sadly, positions taken on the independence issue strongly correlated with ethnic divisions in this highly segmented society.\(^5\)

Fifteen years later Suriname has experienced few advantages of independence and an overdose of agonies, many directly attributable to its promotion to the ranks of independent states. The exodus in the years preceding and following independence were an ominous start. In 1975, an estimated one-third of the population of Suriname lived in the metropolis. Emigration continued legally until 1980 and illegally afterwards.\(^6\) In addition, and due to stringent Dutch restrictions, Surinamers now migrate within the region and particularly to the U.S. as well.

Emigration, particularly from the educated and skilled sectors, contributed to the failure of ambitious development programs\(^7\) and to the virtual collapse of the economy. Per capita income diminished from a relatively high $ 3,300 in the early 1980s to $2,400 in 1986 and since continued its decrease. The state's debt was estimated at $ 75 million in 1988, as against $ 27 million in 1983. The real value of the Suriname guilder is less than 20% of its pre-independence value. The record of the last few

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5. The decision for independence was taken by the predominantly Afro-Suriname cabinetArron. On the eve of independence in 1975, the Hindustani opposition produced figures suggesting that 99.9% (sic) of the Hindustani, 80% of the Javanese and 50% of the Afro-Surinamers were opposed to independence (Dew 1978: 182). On Afro-Suriname nationalism prior to 1975, see Dew 1978, Meel 1990a, and Oostindie 1990.

6. In 1990, the number of Surinamers living in the Netherlands was estimated at 215,000; the total of immigrants was put at 900,000. The population of Suriname is now put at somewhere between 350,000 and 400,000, depending on allowances made for refugees and 'temporary' emigrants. NRC Handelsblad, 6-12-1990, 27-12-1990.

7. The famous 'golden handshake' at independence amounted to 3.5 billion Dutch guilders (approximately 2 billion US $), of which 2.7 were to be spent in a fifteen years' period in accordance with a Multi-Annual Development Plan (MOP). The remainder was destined for guarantees on outstanding loans and to pay-off current debts (Meel 1990: 80).
years indicates that there are few signs of autonomous recovery. Moreover, political developments in the post-Emancipation period have been all but favorable. Suffice to remind of the headlines. First, the apparent incompetence of civil government in 1975-1980. Second, the military regime-Bouterse (1980-1987). Its stated political orientations oscillated between an affiliation with Cuba and Grenada to moderate nationalism; actually, political rhetorics increasingly served to simply conceal the obsession to remain in power, with narcotrafficking becoming the hidden prime mover. This period also witnessed a traumatic guerrilla war against the Maroons, causing substantial flight to Cayenne.

Third: the hesitant return to democracy, culminating in the elections of 25 November, 1987. The 1987-1990 period may be characterized as a persistence of all that some in 1980 had hoped would be suppressed forever (political incompetence, corruption), and of what others had expected to change for the better in 1987 (economic distress, civil disorder, the omnipresent military). Sadly, Suriname continued on a downward slope. With dubious economic prospects, a fragile democracy and an atmosphere of complete disillusionment, all but the military continued to look to the Netherlands as the key to improvement.

Fourth: on Christmas Eve of 1990, the military in a bloodless coup d'etat assumed control again. President Shankar and the entire cabinet Arron were forced to withdraw, and accepted to do so. Parliament sanctioned the coup. The absence of widespread popular protest against the coup may have stemmed partly from fear of renewed military repression; yet it also suggests the low esteem the population had of the accomplishments of civil rule in the 1987-1990 period. Reactions within the region (CARICOM, OAS, Venezuela) were prompt and harsh; so were those of the Netherlands, the U.S., and the European Community. The barely disguised military regime found itself ostracized from the international community, and reacted wisely. New elections were held on May 25,1991. Democracy was restored.

What is next? In the best of scenarios, a new generation of Suriname politicians, less moulded in politics-old style personified in caudillos Arron and Lachmon, may now come to the fore. Worse political scenarios include a return to clientilismo and ethnicity as prime movers of a political system which

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8. - Per capita GDP increased at a yearly average of 4.7% in 1970-1979, yet diminished at a yearly 2.3 rate in the 1979-1985 period. Reliable figures for the subsequent period are sparse but indicate continued deterioration.
will now incorporate the main innovations of the 1980s: military control and corruption related to narcotrafficking. In either of these scenarios, the economic and social prospects are bleak. Clearly, what Suriname needs today even more than before is a life-line. Equally evident, if any country should be called upon to throw that line, this would have to be the Netherlands. A recognition of the inevitability of this 'reluctant embrace' has worried Dutch politicians for some decades now. The 1990 military coup again posited the stalemate in dramatic form. How to react this time? Even with democracy restored one way or another, the Dutch administration would continue to find itself caught in the middle between neo-colonialism and neglect. Neither the pre-1980 nor the post-1987 period had inspired much confidence in the competence and reliability of the democratic administrations. The consensus among Dutch administrators and M.P.s therefore tended towards a claim of stricter control over the development programs and hence over the obligatory preconditions (i.e., democracy). This, however, would imply a renewed Dutch presence, particularly painful after 15 years of independence. Such steps moreover would run contrary to previous Dutch hopes of stepping back as far as possible and to attempts to redefine development aid in a multilateral rather than a bilateral framework.

The next, perhaps abortive Dutch attempt to overcome the stalemate may seem surprising, to say the least. In February, 1991, news came through that members of the Dutch center-left cabinet including prime minister Lubbers were contemplating an up-grading of the present bilateral relations. Certainly, the Christmas coup had caused spokesmen of all major political parties in the Netherlands to review previous commitments and reluctances, and to contemplate a strengthening of current ties. Yet the Lubbers project went well beyond that. The project discussed a Commonwealth relationship, a monetary union, double nationality, and

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10. - The latter option was repeatedly rejected by the 1987-1990 Suriname administration, which feared that multilateralism would be the first Dutch step towards backing out altogether.
11. - The project was submitted by a quartet consisting of Lubbers and the ministers for Foreign Affairs, Development Cooperation, and Justice. The latter is Minister of Antillean and Aruban Affairs as well.
Dutch involvement in Suriname's jurisdiction, foreign affairs and defense. 13

Interestingly, prior to the leaking of its contents, the Lubbers project had already been discussed with, among others, the United States and the Venezuelan administration. Not surprisingly in view of their geo-political concerns, both apparently applauded a renewed Dutch presence in Suriname. (One doubts whether either government would object even to straightforward recolonization.) Brazil, in contrast, expressed misgivings. The Organization of American States was informed without urging for a reaction. It is not entirely clear how France was consulted. It is evident however that France welcomes a stronger Dutch involvement in Suriname, if only because of the repercussion the civil war in Suriname has had for Cayenne.

These 'Commonwealth' plans call for suspicion. Why this scheme for a half-way return to pre-1975 relations, why the possibility for a Commonwealth status refused at the negotiations preceding independence? Arguably, direct Dutch economic interests had not inspired the Lubbers scheme, or only marginally. Dutch investments in Suriname have long ceased to be of relevance to the metropolitan economy. Of more significance was a genuine concern for the dismal condition and the apparent weakness of civil authority in the country. This concern was partly inspired by post-colonial disillusionment; for metropolitan policy makers too, the breakdown after 1975 acted as a painful reminder of both earlier colonialism and the overhasty decolonization of the early 1970s. Moreover, the substantial Suriname community in the Netherlands has never stopped reminding Dutch governments of their enduring responsibilities. Taken together, these factors therefore might lead to decisions which would qualify as ethical, rather than pragmatic.

In addition, of course, more down-to-earth factors are at work. Dutch policy makers may have nurtured the expectation that a Commonwealth scheme will result in economic recovery, which in turn might put an end to the continuing migration to the Netherlands, or even stimulate remigration. Next, the 1980s witnessed a modest European reemergence in the Caribbean, with regional powers such as the U.S. and Venezuela applauding such presence as it enhances regional stability. 14 In this

context, Dutch policy has been moving towards the option of demonstrating a willingness to contribute to such stability, rather than keeping the lowest possible profile. Finally, the relevance of the relatively new 'drugs' factor should be emphasized. Over the past years, a good deal of evidence on drugs production in and narcotrafficking from Suriname has come to the fore. A direct involvement of the military is taken for granted by many, including the American Drugs Enforcement Agency (D.E.A.) and Dutch authorities. In 1990, no less than 60% of all cocaine intercepted in the Netherlands - by then one of the major European centers for the Columbian cartels - was shipped from Suriname. It is therefore not surprising that some politicians have explicitly linked proposals for a Dutch reinvolve ment in Suriname to the necessity of combating narcotraffickers in Suriname. Such motivations were strengthened by evidence regarding infiltration in the Dutch police and custom authorities orchestrated by the Bouterse crew.

A mix of ethical, pragmatic and strategic motivations thus inspired the Commonwealth project. The fact that there is no unequivocal Dutch interest at stake is illustrated by the very mixed reception of the plan. Apparently, even within the cabinet a faction strongly opposed the proposed reinvolvedment. In parliament, reactions were uneven, cross-cutting the customary political stances. In the rank and file of both government and opposition parties, many expressed strong misgivings. One argument frequently heard was that such moves might be interpreted as 'recolonization' by other nations - the very last impression the Dutch care to make. Another argument was that the Dutch might find themselves embroiled in more delicate businesses than anyone cares to think about. Yet another objection, not articulated as openly but perhaps the more so in the back of many minds, is that a new Commonwealth relationship would simply cost the Netherlands far too much - money, that is.

Particularly with a view to preventing possible accusations of deliberate recolonization, Dutch politicians and commentators coincided in arguing against any further steps until unequivocal support from Suriname for any sort of reengagement was expressed. Concrete steps should only be taken if and when definite majorities in the Suriname parliament and among the population as such had expressed such desire. This was - and still is - a demanding and perhaps inhibitive condition. As moreover a

significant number of Dutch politicians and policy makers will be voting against Commonwealth projects anyway, the Lubbers scheme could easily melt into thin air.

In Suriname, the 'Commonwealth option', whether real or illusionary, was mainly on the hidden agenda of the May, 1991 elections. Since, however, reactions of the rank and file of the Suriname political parties and the enthusiasm in the Suriname community in the Netherlands have suggested that Dutch reinvolve ment is perceived as the only way out for the republic. On the one hand, it is difficult to see otherwise. An illusion of full independence may be lost, yet an economic future regained. On the other hand, one wonders how a Commonwealth relationship and a metropolitan life-line may be realized without completely undermining Suriname's independence, both administratively and psychologically. A Commonwealth relationship as such need not be a painful outcome of decolonization. Rather, the bitter pill to swallow would be the inevitability of settling for such outcome after 15-odd years of 'full' independence.

3. The disintegration of the Netherlands Antilles

In May, 1969, popular unrest in Willemstad, Curacao unexpectedly led to rioting and looting. In accordance with the 1954 Statuut of the Kingdom, Dutch marines were called in to reestablish order. As they did, the world's press documented a European military intervention in an 'autonomous' former colony. Nobody liked this. The Dutch had found themselves obliged to intervene; now they were denounced for neo-colonialism. For the next two decades, 'May 1969' supposedly represented a watershed in Dutch relations with the Netherlands Antilles. Mainly for ideological reasons, successive Dutch governments tried hard to shed the former Dutch Caribbean colonies, which should become independent long before the end of this millennium.

The above was a common interpretation of Dutch policy towards the Netherlands Antilles over the past two decades. Linked to this interpretation was the conviction that the Dutch would impose 'voluntary' independence on these islands, just as they had done on Suriname. Closer analysis,

17. - To be sure, hardly a politician raised a voice against the project, as this would have resulted in considerable electoral losses.
however, proves this interpretation incomplete and, surprisingly, the prophecy self-defeating.

Before elaborating on the debate over 'full decolonization' as it unfolded in the last decades, it is perhaps fitting to emphasize the present attitude of the Netherlands Antilles government. This attitude, officially at least, crystallized to the simple statement that the debate over independence as pushed by the Dutch was irrelevant. Self-determination, according to the Antilleans, may very well signify the deliberate choice not to attain full independence. More concretely, the Kingdom relations as defined in the 1954 Statuut should be interpreted as enduring, unless all partners involved opt for a change of the status quo. The Antillean government, a self-determining partner, feels that full independence is not an attractive alternative to the present situation, at least not until the islands state has attained a higher level of viability. Therefore, the Netherlands shall have to refrain from threatening or even suggesting to impose independence and sever the relations within the Kingdom as this would imply violating the constitutional right to self-determination of its Kingdom partner.

Recently, this position was aptly summarized by the Antillean representative to the European Community, who stated that 'independence' was not a relevant topic for discussion 'since we already attained our independence with the Statuut of 1954.' Both Dutch and Antillean lawyers have discussed the juridical merits of the issue, with most of these scholars eventually tending to corroborate the Antillean position. Dutch politicians on the other hand have been hesitant at best to accept this position, since it would imply a virtual impossibility to part with the Antilles.

In view of the consistent Antillean refusal to even discuss independence, the Dutch slowly reconsidered their policy. In the following, emphasis will be laid on the political motivations guiding Dutch policy changes. It should be born in mind however that the juridical sting was never neutralized. In other words, even if hard-liners on imposing independence would have gained preponderance in the Dutch political arena, it is highly

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21. - Suriname, in 1973, agreed to secede from the Kingdom. So did Aruba, at least according to the Dutch interpretation, in 1983. Both countries therefore used the right to self-determination differently from the Netherlands Antilles.
questionable whether they could have pushed ahead without stumbling on major juridical obstacles. 22 Clearly there are important implications for future hard-boiled Dutch policy makers here.

But even with this crucial observation left out, an analysis of Dutch policy over the past two decades has to pinpoint a gradual reconsideration of positions, culminating in an explicit U-turn. The initial position was relatively clear, with most Dutch political parties favoring independence in a not too distant future. Why was this so? The 'May 1969' trauma has been of clear yet diminishing importance for Dutch motivation in pushing the Netherlands Antilles towards independence. 23 If the Dutch still nurture apprehensions about a neo-colonial image, by the 1990s imposing rather than withholding independence has become the bone of contention. In addition, other arguments inspired the Dutch decolonization policy of the last decades. The financial burden of 250 to 300 million guilders a year (approximately 155 billion US $) may not be crucial; but it has occasionally provoked criticism, irritation, and wishful thinking of reallocation of state funds to the Netherlands proper. Next, the growing number of Antilleans 24 leaving for the Netherlands has caused fears about mass migration similar to the Suriname exodus. And finally, the 'wheel of politics', set in motion in the late 1960s, long seemed irresistible: once the leading Dutch political parties pledged themselves to complete decolonization, conceptualized as full independence, they apparently found it very difficult to reconsider.

Yet surprisingly, they did, and so did the Dutch government. Complying at last with the stubborn refusal of the Netherlands Antilles to accept independence, in 1990 the Dutch administration finally declared that independence would be taken from the agenda. Even more significant, the Dutch agreed not to force Aruba to become an independent state in

22. - Antillean spokesmen made it clear that in such case, their government would have fought Dutch policy up to the highest international judicial institutions, as well as in the United Nations.
24. - In this paper, 'Antillean(s)' is used to designate all six islands (and the inhabitants, respectively) of the previous Netherlands Antilles. More precise terms are rather long-winded (Netherlands Antillean(s) and Aruban(s)) or, with a view to the upcoming disintegration, not yet coined.
1996. This is telling, since in this case the juridical argument put forward by the Antillean government does not apply. When the Arubans in 1983 successfully negotiated a status aparte as of 1 January 1986, the Dutch consented only reluctantly. As a sort of penalty for their splitting the six island state, the Arubans grudgingly had to accept another amendment to the Statuut: their full independence as of 1 January, 1996. This package deal was resented by the Arubans, and as soon as the status aparte - read: the separation of the Curacao-dominated Netherlands Antilles - had materialized, Aruban politicians started to militate against the second phase of the covenant. Unlike the Netherlands Antillean juridical position, theirs was disputable at best. The fact that the Dutch administration declared its willingness to postpone Aruban independence to time indefinite was another clear indication of the change in Dutch policy for its Caribbean legacy. Subsequently, in one form or another, the Dutch/Dutch Caribbean Kingdom of the Netherlands will survive well into the next millennium.

This change in Dutch policy has not, or at least not primarily, been inspired by economic or strategic reasons. Where Antillean politicians perceived continued Dutch presence as crucial, Dutch politicians may have thought of these last remnants of empire as a nuisance, but at least a minor one. An annual quarter of a billion Dutch guilders of development aid is crucial from an Antillean perspective; it is not critical to the Dutch. And while the migration outlet to the Netherlands may be essential for Antilleans, additional Antillean immigration for Dutch policy makers is no welcome prospect, but neither is it a nightmare.

Thus Antillean politicians and the electorate, both firmly opposed to independence, have benefitted from the very smallness of their societies, which made it easier for the Dutch to stop pestering them with the menace of unsolicited independence. In addition, the disillusion in Suriname's post-independence record did much to sober those who felt independence would provide the islands with a fresh impetus to attain economic and political viability and self-reliance. Ironically therefore, the Suriname debacle

25. - A summary of the Aruban case is provided by Croes & Moenir Alam 1990.
27. - The total migrant population of the Netherlands is estimated at 900,000 in a total population of 15 million. Some 60,000 Antilleans and Arubans live in the Netherlands; the present population of the five islands' Netherlands Antilles is put at 190,000, with Curacao accounting for 160,000. Aruba has some 65,000 inhabitants.
was a remote blessing for the Antilles. Finally, outside interests, particularly the U.S. and Venezuela, may have put mounting pressure on the Dutch not to relinquish these territories. The geopolitical risks of a power vacuum may have inspired such pressure; and more recently, problems associated with narcotrafficking and money laundering have assumed major importance.

The recent Dutch U-turn initially appears as a clear victory for the Antillean politicians and their electorate. They managed to stave off an independence they did not want. Centrifugal tendencies within the uneasy federation of six prevailed over the traditional Dutch policy of keeping the six together at all costs. The reverse side of the coin is Dutch defeat. Dutch policy over the past decades tried to impose independence; it failed. So did the Dutch effort to keep the Antilles-of-six together: an Aruban status aparte was accepted in 1983, the recent policy admits to the virtual inevitability of a breaking up of the former Netherlands Antilles into three separate entities, and perhaps even that will not be sufficient to calm the centrifugal tendencies.

Yet one wonders what price the two, three or perhaps even more Antillean micro-states will pay for the security of remaining within the Kingdom. My suggestion is that the cost might well be at least a shortterm reduction of their autonomy. Now that the Dutch have yielded on the Issues of Independence and the fragmentation of the Netherlands Antilles, they may claim a stronger say in Antillean affairs. Constitutionally, such policy would be difficult to implement. After all, the Statuut advances the partners' autonomy as a corner stone. In addition, the Schets presently under discussion even advocates furthering this autonomy. Yet day-to-day realities might lead another way.

The debate over the codification of a new Statuut, a debate dominated by the Dutch minister of Antillean and Aruban affairs, has provided the first clues to this - if the hyperbole is acceptable - 'recolonization'. In his 1990 Schets, minister Hirsch Ballin linked the (Indefinite) postponement of independence to firm regulations which should impede further changes of the status quo within the Kingdom. With the acceptance of the new Statuut, any partner would be either in, or

28. - Aruba; Curaçao and Bonaire; and the Windwards Antilles (St. Maarten, St. Eustatius and Saba).
29. - The Schets discusses a Gemeenbest (Commonwealth) relationship, yet this term seems to have been chosen mainly for political reasons. In fact, the present
out. In addition, Hirsch Ballin indicated that any break-up of the former Netherlands Antilles beyond the proposed tripartite solution to him was unacceptable. 30 The only permissible alternatives to the division in three entities would be the fictional options of choosing for full independence, maintaining the present status (with the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba as two autonomous entities) or even the reinsertion of Aruba into the Netherlands Antilles.

This 'take it or leave it' approach suggests that the Dutch are willing to make considerable concessions, but might not refrain from imposing restrictions. Thus a unanimous vote of all major Curaçaoan political parties for a 'status aparte' was virtually ignored. As Curaçaoan politicians next accused the Dutch minister of Antillean and Aruban affairs of neo-colonialism, he only reiterated further fragmentation was out of the question. The latest move was the unanimous vote of the Curaçaoan parliament for a status aparte. The Dutch in routine fashion rehearsed their objections against this secession. 31 This conflict may very well dominate the political agenda for the next years, as all parties are aware of its significance both for the constitutional future of the Antilles and for the immediate question as to who has the last word in this domain. The possible imposition of a structured break-up does not disturb Curaçao only. Bonaire objects to a subordinated bilateral relationship with Curaçao. Saba and St. Eustatius prefer a direct link with the Netherlands rather than being subsumed under St. Maarten. The latter, finally, like Curaçao, prefers a separate status. Confronted with so many different voices, the Dutch government so far seems to (gently, and perhaps real slowly) push a decision which may indeed be the best conceivable one. Yet the imposition of this restructuring of the former Netherlands Antilles would imply a rather authoritarian start of the new Statuut period. 32 Such a start would clearly qualify the pious statement in

discussion is on a modernization of the Statuut, not on the creation of a fundamentally new relationship.

30. - Schets 1990: 5-6, 15-16.
32. - It seems probable that the Dutch will not strive for an immediate way-out. In stead, their policy might be to slowly and softly encourage the formation of the two entities besides Aruba. This way, the Netherlands Antilles-of-five would gradually fade away, with St Maarten taking over Windwards matters from the national administration in Curaçao. This scenario implies that the formulation of a new Statuut may take a long time indeed. In fact, after the first rather enthusiastic reactions to the Schets, Dutch M.P.s next criticized Hirsch Ballin for pushing the 'tripartite'
the Schets to 'take the wishes and longings [of the Antilleans] in consideration as far as possible [my italics]'.

The Schets also departs from the desirability to 'enhance the autonomous status of the [Dutch Caribbean] islands' as far as possible. Yet close reading of the Schets and subsequent Dutch government papers suggests that the islands' autonomy could be reduced rather than increased. Extracts from the Dutch proposals on Antillean public administration provide some indications. The March, 1990 Schets advocated 'a stronger accent' on autonomy of the various Dutch Caribbean entities and linked this to a parallel increase of the islands' 'own responsibility'. Subsequent Dutch state papers such as the September, 1990 proposals to the Dutch parliament elaborated on ways for the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba to enhance their autonomy and self-reliance. The need for 'modernization' and 'professionalization' of public management is a recurring theme. One senses a Dutch irritation over past and present performance of the Dutch Caribbean public sector.

In this proposal, the Dutch minister of Antillean and Aruban Affairs also proposed how this 'professionalization' might be implemented. Temporary transfer of Dutch human capital to the Caribbean is the key. In this option, Dutch specialists will help to enhance the quality of Dutch Caribbean public management. Ostensibly for reassurance, the Minister documented that the assistance would not be one-time, but rather structural and long-standing. Implicitly, however, one could read here a devastating comment on the policy of 'Antilleanization' which was a guideline for all Antillean governments since the early 1970s. This policy aimed at substituting Antilleans for Dutch professionals at all levels of both the public and private sectors. Now, for the Dutch policy makers, the pendulum apparently must swing back.

It is tempting to read 'recolonization' in these Dutch proposals. The persuasive long-term prospect offered is that professionalization will result in increased self-reliance and greater viability. Yet this prospect seems to be indeed long-term, and meanwhile Dutch assistance could put mounting

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option too strongly. One argument is the apprehension that St. Maarten, with its dubious administrative record, will not be able to correctly manage Windward affairs. Slotverklaring 1991: 3-5, Volkskrant, 28-1-1991.

33. - Schets 1990: 3.

pressure on the Antillean public sector. This may not come as a surprise. From a Dutch perspective, it is justifiable that their Caribbean partners pay for being 'allowed' to remain within the Kingdom by relinquishing some of their previous autonomy. The Dutch may well dominate the formulation of the new Statuw, and apparently their Kingdom partners - who actually are not at all interested in changing the status quo - might find it hard to avert a curtailment of their previous autonomy. Again, the acute problems related to narcotrafficking may act as a catalyst: in the near future, the Antilles will be of vital logistical importance in the Dutch contribution to the campaign against Caribbean drugs trade.

Growing Dutch involvement will also extend to more 'assistance' in the legal system and the administration of justice. Again, between the lines of Dutch policy papers, and certainly in the Dutch press, one reads Dutch discontent over the previous decades of autonomy in internal affairs.

Likewise, an occasional allusion to the political culture of the islands, with small-scale restricting the scope for policy making by local politicians, may be read as a suggestion that outside (Dutch) Interference is needed to make things work. In this regard, persistent rumors and indications on public sector corruption, money laundering and narcotrafficking in St. Maarten have now facilitated a Dutch reinvolve

A growing Dutch presence in the Antilles will also affect the private sector. If state bureaucracy becomes more efficient, the advocated professionalization of the public sector might benefit the private sector. In addition, the composition of the Antillean and Aruban private sector may undergo significant changes. With independence off the agenda, Dutch private enterprise is rediscovering these distant Islands. The European integration of 1992 and the possibility of future similar pan-American schemes may also encourage Dutch businesses to plant a firm foothold in these in-between zones. A sequel - rather than a prior stimulus - to renewed Dutch influence in the public sector may therefore be Dutch private sector reemergence.

Where will these developments lead, and for what period will the former Netherlands Antilles continue to be part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands Antilles? The latter question defies an answer for the long-term, yet is easily answered for the short- and middle-term. From an Antillean perspective, three issues have motivated the policy of maintaining the

Kingdom: economic security, internal democracy, and territorial integrity. The new Dutch proposals strive to continue or enhance the previous Kingdom guarantees in these fields. Dutch Caribbean initiatives to withdraw from the Kingdom are therefore not likely. Neither are Dutch efforts to break away; after all the *Schets* is a pledge not to part company.

Perhaps inadvertently, Dutch state documents provide an ever-receding horizon to anyone interested in thinking of (or rendering lip-service to) future independence. In a presentation to the Dutch parliament, minister Hirsch Ballin mentioned the need to attain 'a reasonable level of prosperity and welfare' as a precondition for full independence. 36 In the coming decades, Dutch Caribbean policy makers and populations alike will continue to relate the 'reasonability' of their level of prosperity and welfare to Dutch or perhaps U.S., rather than to average Caribbean, standards. Hence Antillean policy makers will continue to claim to be 'in the process' of attaining such levels, and their Dutch counterparts apparently are now willing to be involved in this ongoing process, rather than declaring it completed.

Where will this put the former Netherlands Antilles in the next decade? An educated guess points to the following scenario. Independence is off.

The former Netherlands Antilles will further disintegrate; on the modalities, a hard battle which might take more than one decade will be fought. The Dutch presence will be reconfirmed. No matter how hard officials will emphasize the Dutch compliance with Antillean autonomy, some critics will denounce the up-grading of Dutch presence as a creeping recolonization. 37 If a new-style *Status* will be concluded, it may be a halfway-house like the previous *Status*, but this time it will be a halfway-house to further integration into the Kingdom rather than to full independence.

With respect to territorial integrity, the new *Status* will not alter the previous, satisfactory arrangements. For economic stability and prospects, the new status will provide a level of security that independence certainly would not. Because of the long-term commitment it will even be more

36. - TK 1990-1991: 4. Welfare is defined here as well-being (a very Dutch policy statement), not as a reference to social security.

37. - Certainly, the status of the French *Départements d'Outre-Mer* will become a new point of reference. Critics might object that Dutch presence in the Antilles will tend to parallel French presence in the DOMs.
advantageous than the first Statuut, with its connotations of a last stop before independence.

This may seem good news to those not ideologically committed to full independence, and on balance I would agree. Yet there are drawbacks which may cause serious frictions and social unrest in the years ahead. Dutch minister Hirsch Ballin admits 'that some tension may arise between the possibility of creating intensified relations of cooperation and the necessity of respecting the independence of the countries with respect to legislation and administration'. More bluntly, increased Dutch influence in 'internal' Antillean affairs might well cause resentment. Politicians and higher public servants who will find their power curtailed and their authority eroded might be the first to voice resentment. However, given the present low involvement by the electorate and apparent misgivings with local politics, one doubts whether at this stage an increased Dutch presence would cause widespread unrest.

Yet in the future unrest could emerge. Over the past decades, local dissatisfaction with Antillean affairs was directed against local policy makers. But what if Dutch-propelled 'professionalization' succeeds in implementing the long overdue reorganization schemes for the public sector and fires large numbers of public servants in the process? What if a reversal of the previous policy of 'Antilleanization' results in a conspicuous increase of Dutch officials and in perceived or real blockades of career opportunities for Antilleans? What, finally, if an increased presence of Dutchmen of all sorts and classes has side-effects such as a rise in the costs of real estate and housing, the emergence of dual salary structures for locals and Dutch specialists, or the reemergence of Dutch neo-colonial arrogance (and racism) that disappeared or was suppressed in the previous decades? It will certainly demand prudent social engineering to prevent social polarization on these lines. If not, renewed divisions could spark off anti-Dutch resentments that today seem dormant or hardly existent particularly if the recent economic recovery will not prove to be structural.

38. - TK 1990-1991: 9
39. - Such criticism has already been voiced by the major political parties. One Antillean minister characterized the Schets as 'a vision of the donor', one that does not take the wishes of the recipient into account (Nederlands Dagblad, 12-12-1990). This, in a nutshell, indeed depicts the actual asymmetric relationship.
Finally, where will the former Netherlands Antilles stand in the Caribbean? Probably, they will be on the fringe as privileged onlookers. Like the French Départements d'Outre-Mer and the remaining British West Indian dependencies, the six Antillean islands will ensure, and be assured, that the vital European connection remains intact. From this basis, Aruba, Curaçao and St. Maarten will continue to explore both U.S. and Latin American markets. The main change might be that Dutch business involvement in these efforts will increase.

Economic prospects for the Antilles are clearly more favorable than those generally prevailing in the Caribbean. This will not spur these (three?) Antillean micro-states to join Caribbean economic cooperation schemes such as CARICOM. Rather, the 1992 European integration will probably draw Europe's Caribbean territories more to the Old World. At this moment, the Antilles are trying hard to attain unlimited entrance to the E.C. markets. 40 Again, this points to the conclusion that the European connection will not lessen. Even if Hemispheric projects for a pan-American economic community materialize, the Dutch Caribbean Islands will strive for having the best of both worlds. If forced to choose, they will probably opt for Europe, not the Hemisphere, as a second best after participating in both. In this respect, the former Netherlands Antilles, like the Départements d'Outre-Mer, will continue to be dissenters in the Hemisphere.

Finally, with both the actual and prospective economic situation being far more favorable than the general Caribbean outlook, the Antilles will continue to be an attractive destination for intra-Caribbean migration. This link to the region is also being severed. Recently, the present governments of the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba have been curtailing immigration. They will continue to do so, as the Netherlands will increasingly make sure they do. Again, '1992' will be a magical year. With Europe becoming one bloc without internal borders, more emphasis will be given to outside frontiers to restrict immigration. Little doubt exists that the European community will make sure the outer frontiers of the 'fortress Europe' will stand as high in the Caribbean outposts as they do in the continent itself. This, too, will run counter to any scheme for Caribbean integration.

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4. Conclusion

A comparison of the contemporary history and actual prospects of the former Dutch Caribbean colonies points to some sad conclusions regarding full independence for Caribbean micro-states.

For Suriname, independence has brought few of the advantages that its advocates had hoped for, and more of the disadvantages that its adversaries prophesied. Even in Dutch political circles questions are now raised regarding the previous Dutch insistence on independence, and on the viability of Suriname as an independent republic as such. The tragic irony is that the major hope for many Surinamers now is a turn backwards of the wheel of history. Yet the chances (not to speak of desirability) for such a 'recolonization' are dubious. More probably, Suriname will remain an independent republic in the shadow of a reluctant patron whose newspapers still bring Suriname news on the domestic pages.

For the 1990s, one may forecast that the Dutch will find it impossible not to be drawn back into Suriname. Most Suriname politicians - the military being a crucial exception to this rule - understandably feel that the Dutch card is the safest, if not the only one, to play. If Commonwealth projects shatter - most likely in the Netherlands - the Dutch will do their utmost to impose multilateralism on the former colony. Perhaps, in view of issues such as narco-trafficking and regional stability, the U.S., Brazil and Venezuela will not be altogether unwilling to participate in such programs. Suriname would then be forced to slowly accept a downgrading of the previous 'special relation'. In this process, the republic would be obliged to look more to the Caribbean and the Hemisphere at large. But even if Suriname be drawn into heightening its Caribbean profile, and even if the Dutch find some ways to lower theirs in Suriname, on balance the two will not escape their traditional reluctant embrace in the next decade, and well beyond that.

In contrast to Suriname, the former Netherlands Antilles belong to the highest income group within the region. Since this status is partly attributable to the continued incorporation within the Kingdom of the Netherlands, it is of no surprise that successive Antillean (and, since 1983, Aruban) governments have dedicated much effort to perpetuate this link. The Dutch have finally given up their dual policy of pushing towards independence and keeping the six islands together. The new Dutch policy
now opts for a prolongation of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and suggests the break-up of the Netherlands Antilles into three autonomous entities (Aruba; Curaçao and Bonaire; the Windwards). The rewards for the Antilles are clear. A continued Dutch presence will guarantee a relatively favorable economic profile, territorial integrity, and stable democracy.

Yet the price the Antillean pays could be higher than expected. The restructuring of the Antilles into three countries meets with serious objections in the Antilles. Moreover, the new Kingdom projects imply an increase of Dutch involvement in Antillean public administration and therefore might downgrade the previous internal autonomy. Hence, in hyperbole, a 'recolonization' of these six islands.

Finally, a word on Dutch 'recolonization'. Colonization traditionally and rightly is associated with imperialist objectives. By decolonization we understand the colonized people's emancipation from the colonizers; full independence in this context has been the usual, if not necessarily only option. So what about 'recolonization'? Clearly, in this paper the term has been used provocatively. In the context of Dutch Caribbean policy, it will not pass any test of scrutiny.

If recolonization, like colonization, is understood as a process aiming at enriching the metropolis, the recent Dutch Caribbean policy simply does not fit in. Dutch politicians over the past decades have not erred in thinking that dismissing their last ex-colonies would be sound economic policy from a metropolitan point of view. Only, they have found it impossible to proceed that way. Hence the reluctant Dutch recognition that this chapter of Dutch colonialism cannot be closed, and hence subsequent projects to upgrade present involvement. We may think of this as 'recolonization' in the sense of renewed presence. Yet it is dubious as best whether such 'recolonization' will offer the metropolis any benefits comparable to those in store for the former colonies. Precisely the latter consideration may well prevent Dutch 'recolonization' of Suriname, much to the latter's disadvantage.
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