

Head versus Heart

The Ambiguities of Non-Sovereignty in the Dutch Caribbean

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Abstract:

Whereas political scientists tend to make binary distinctions between sovereign states and subnational units, in recent decades the number and popularity of a third, hybrid category of non-sovereign jurisdictions has strongly increased. In this paper we explore the benefits and downsides of non-sovereignty from the perspective of these territories' inhabitants. We zoom in on the six islands of the Dutch Caribbean, which have been comparatively well-documented, and in 2010 experienced a profound change in their political status. Using data from two large-scale opinion surveys that we conducted in 1998 and 2015 respectively, we show that the population of the Dutch Caribbean islands maintains a highly ambiguous attitude towards the non-sovereign status. While a wide majority of respondents recognize and appreciate the material benefits of the enduring link with the metropolis, there are significant emotional and ideational objections to this relationship. These ambiguities have deepened in recent years, especially on the three islands that since the 2010 reforms are governed directed from the metropolis as 'public bodies', a sort of overseas municipalities. .

Political scientists commonly distinguish between two types of political units: sovereign states and subnational administrations such as federal states, provinces, and municipalities. Yet this distinction overlooks a third category that is comprised of so-called non-sovereign territories, which in many ways can be seen as political hybrids, enjoying some but not all of the privileges of fully sovereign states. In fact, these 'partially independent territories' (Rezvani, 2014) have not only grown in number in recent decades, but have also increasingly come to be seen as legitimate or even favorable political units by politicians, scholars, and constitutional lawyers alike.

In spite of their growing legitimacy, however, non-sovereign political arrangements share their own distinct problems. These may arise from their generally small scale, from their constitutional status, or from a combination of both. In this article we examine and highlight the benefits and downsides of non-sovereignty, as they are identified, perceived, and recognized by the inhabitants of these territories themselves. In doing so, we zoom in on the six Caribbean islands that are constitutionally part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. By means of a comparison between two opinion surveys that were conducted on these islands in 1998 and 2015 respectively, we demonstrate that the inhabitants of the Dutch Caribbean islands increasingly experience a so-called head-versus-heart dilemma, in which non-sovereignty is perceived as a rationally pragmatic, yet emotionally and/or ideologically unsatisfactory political arrangement. Our analysis also reveals that the increasingly significant role of the Netherlands on these islands has resulted in augmented resistance towards the Dutch metropolis, even if the more material benefits of the constitutional link with The Netherlands remain strongly relevant to the island populations.

The existence of myriad former colonies that have not made the transition towards independent states is a counterintuitive outcome of the supposedly global process of decolonization which started in the Americas almost 250 years ago and swept over Asia and Africa since the mid-1940s. Why did decolonization not result in the complete dismissal of all former colonial empires? A decisive factor has been that in the final round of Western decolonization, former colonial states and former colonies reached some sort of political arrangement short of independence. Today, these 'confetti of empire' (Guillebaud 1976) lay scattered across the globe, mainly situated in the Atlantic, Caribbean, the Pacific and the Indian Ocean. With a few exceptions, they are all islands, and the wide majority have populations of less than half a million, many even less than 100,000. As independent entities, the overwhelming majority would qualify as micro-states. Under some sort of postcolonial umbrella, they are formally all democracies, with their local parliament and government constituted through open electoral processes. Ultimately however, they are either integrated in, or subsumed under the authority of a larger metropolitan state.

The populations of some of these non-sovereign jurisdictions, especially those in the Caribbean, look back on a colonial history marked by denigration and negligence at best, brutal exploitation, racism and slavery at worst. Moreover, in the contemporary postcolonial arrangements they are still subsumed in one way or another under metropolitan authority

and have to deal with metropolitan interventions and officials, resulting in routine confrontations with an inevitable racial dimension. Why then did overwhelming majorities opt to remain within this postcolonial fold, and why do they stick to this preference today? Surprisingly little systematic research has been done on this question – as indeed small-scale jurisdictions are a neglected field of research in comparative political science more broadly ([omitted]). But from what we do know, it is absolutely clear that pragmatism dictates the sentiment and hence the vote. In comparison to similar small-scale sovereign states, these non-sovereign entities are on average better off economically, can rely on metropolitan protection for the functioning of democracy, human rights and territorial integrity, and their citizens have the passport of, and hence the right of abode in the metropolis (Aldrich and Connell 1998, Baldacchino and Milne 2006, [omitted]). Apparently these material advantages are valued above the more abstract values embodied by the choice for independence, in spite of the everyday predicament of living a post-, or if you will neo-colonial condition.

In this contribution, we focus on one particularly well-documented segment of the overall non-sovereign world, the Caribbean parts of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.¹ Following a sketch of the relevant constitutional and political developments, we zoom in on the repercussions of increasingly interventionist Dutch policies since the 1990s. To this end, we compare the outcomes of two large-scale surveys held on these islands, one in 1998, another in 2015. These surveys document deeply ambiguous insular feelings, an ambivalence which in turn leads to urgent questions about the appropriateness of Dutch policies. In the conclusion, we discuss the broader relevance of these findings in understanding the contemporary ambiguities of non-sovereignty in the Caribbean and beyond.

Decolonization and non-sovereignty

While the conventional wisdom of the mid-20th century dictated that decolonization is analogous to the attainment of independence, the emergence of non-sovereign territories around the world has strongly challenged this notion (Hintjens 1997, Miles 2001, Clegg and Pantojas-García 2009). The outcome of enduring non-sovereignty resulted from non-violent, fairly transparent and internationally sanctioned political processes in the post-World War Two period. None of the contemporary non-sovereign jurisdictions has been forced by military and/or political means to remain within the postcolonial fold. On the contrary, in all of these places local populations have expressed their preference for a non-sovereign status in elections, referenda, and other kinds of plebiscites, in some of these occasionally, in other jurisdictions frequently. There is not one single instance of a former metropolitan power withholding the transfer of sovereignty in case a local, democratically elected government representing the will of the local majority has demanded independence.

¹ In this designation 'Dutch Caribbean', we do not include Suriname, formerly a Dutch colony but an independent republic since 1975.

² The results for 1977, 1993-94, 2000 and 2004-05 pertain to government-organized plebiscites. The results for

There are certainly metropolitan interests in maintaining the status quo. These are particularly evident for larger metropolitan powers such as France, the United Kingdom and the United States, the latter a late but active participant in Western colonialism. For geopolitical reasons, these states value their constitutional presence across various parts of the globe. Military and political strategy may be the leading concern, but there are also economic motives, particularly as the possession of isolated islands implies a claim to significant parts of the surrounding waters. Likewise, the British presence in places such as Gibraltar and the Falkland Islands/Malvinas, the French presence in the sparsely populated islands of the Indian Ocean and in French Guiana, and the Spanish presence in Ceuta and Melilla are linked to strategic interest, if only because ceding these places to other states is associated with abandonment, a demonstration of weakness and hence an image problem. In contrast, however, most of the British, as well as Dutch, and New Zealand policies vis-a-vis their overseas territories have long been dictated by a preference for complete withdrawal based on the conviction that the former colonies had become a geopolitical, economic and migratory liability rather than an asset (Clegg and Gold 2012, [omitted]).

At present, in international politics the phenomenon of enduring non-sovereignty is not undisputed, but neither a hot issue. Over half a century ago, the United Nations have accepted non-sovereignty as an accepted outcome of the process of decolonization, as long as the local population has been allowed to use its right to self-determination by expressing its preference about the constitutional future. According to the United Nations, the transfer of sovereignty is but one acceptable outcome of the process of decolonization. Integration in, or some sort of constitutional association with the former colonial state is equally acceptable. This new consensus gives priority to the self-determination of the (former) colony and implies that a former metropolitan state can neither refuse the transfer of sovereignty nor impose a constitutional farewell on an unwilling population (Hintjens 1997; Corbin 2009). The United Nations monitors a – somewhat arbitrarily selected – subset of these non-sovereign entities in its Special Committee on Decolonization established in 1961. Over the past decades, much of the debates in this context have had a rather ritual character (United Nations Special Committee on Decolonization 2016).

A considerable number of the non-sovereign entities are located in the Caribbean. Decolonization started early with the independence of Haiti (1804), followed by the Dominican Republic (1822) and Cuba (1901). After World War Two, much of the British West Indies followed the same course (1962-1983), as did Suriname (1975). However, France retained its colonies, officially designated as overseas provinces (*Départements d'Outre Mer*) in 1946. The United States is still constitutionally present in the so-called Commonwealth of Puerto Rico as well as the U.S. Virgin Islands, as are the United Kingdom in a handful of Overseas Territories and the Netherlands in six Antillean islands. With the exception of Puerto Rico (with some 4 million inhabitants), all of these entities have small populations (between a few thousand to 400,000), and with the exception of French Guiana, all are

islands. The share of these non-sovereign territories in the total population of the Caribbean is around fifteen per cent.

There are highly diverse constitutional frameworks for non-sovereignty in the Caribbean, ranging from quasi-colonial constructions such as the British Overseas Territories where a British governor has ultimate power; via near-complete integration as overseas departments, such as the French Caribbean; to constructions such as the quasi-federal *Statuut*, or the sui generis status of Puerto Rico as a Commonwealth or *Estado Libre Asociado*. Degrees of autonomy vary considerably among these variants, but all leave ultimate power with the metropolitan state. The legitimacy of these political arrangements is defended by referring to non-sovereignty as an expression of self-determination confirmed in plebiscites and elections. More often than not, such electoral processes have been organized post hoc, to ascertain a population's opinion about some sort of construction introduced earlier on the basis of negotiations by political elites.

Whenever plebiscites, elections or surveys were held in the non-sovereign Caribbean, outcomes have confirmed the choice against independence. This may seem surprising, in a region characterized by a brutal history of colonialism and slavery which has left deep scars in the social fabric of these societies. But apparently, local populations value the security of the various postcolonial arrangements over the option of full sovereignty (Baldacchino and Milne 2006, [omitted]). The result, in all of these Caribbean territories, is a condition of deep ambivalence. The Dutch Caribbean islands provide a well-documented illustration of this.

The decolonization of the Dutch Caribbean

The Kingdom of the Netherlands is trans-Atlantic, uniting one middle-sized European country with six tiny islands in the Caribbean, colonized in the 1630s. There has been no decolonization in the classical sense, meaning the transfer of sovereignty from the metropolis to the former colonies. Rather, since constitutional restructuring in 2010, three of the islands (Aruba, Curaçao and St. Maarten, together accounting for some 300,000 people) are autonomous countries within the Kingdom, while the least populated ones (Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba, totaling just over 25,000) have become public bodies or 'overseas municipalities' of the Netherlands.

The Dutch Caribbean is the remnant of a once impressive colonial empire with its center of gravity in Asia ([omitted]). The core of Dutch colonialism was situated in the Dutch East Indies. Here classical colonialism – based on economic and geopolitical interests combined with administrative zeal – was abruptly ended by a classical decolonization struggle marked by bloody battles and protracted negotiations, subsequently poisoning postcolonial relations. Concurrent with this arduous process, The Hague developed a decolonization policy for its Caribbean colonies. The outcome was the *Statuut* or Charter for the Kingdom of the Netherlands, proclaimed in 1954. The Charter defined the Kingdom as a voluntary relationship between three equal and internally autonomous countries: the Netherlands,

Suriname and the six Caribbean islands which together formed the Netherlands Antilles. This definition of the relationship between the metropolis and its former colonies represented a middle path between two extremes that were not seriously discussed at the time by any of the partners involved: full sovereignty for the former Caribbean colonies or, conversely, complete integration into the metropolis as provinces.

According to the Charter's preamble, the three countries 'take care of their own interests autonomously, manage communal affairs on an equal footing, and accord each other assistance' (cited in [omitted]). The Charter defines foreign policy, defense, citizenship, and the safeguarding of good governance as matters of common interest to be governed by the Kingdom of the Netherlands. This Kingdom government was simply delineated as the ruling Dutch cabinet expanded to include one plenipotentiary minister for each of the two Caribbean territories. The initial idea to inaugurate a Kingdom parliament to which this expanded government would be accountable was abandoned, resulting in the democratic deficit of a Kingdom government without a corresponding Kingdom parliament (Hillebrink 2008, Broekhuijse 2013). Combining elements of federalism and unitary government, the Charter establishes a quasi-federal Kingdom, with a *sui generis* institutional structure that is unique in the world (Hillebrink 2008, [omitted]).

Suriname attained independence in 1975 under circumstances completely different from the conditions under which Indonesia secured its independence. By then, the Dutch government saw little economic and geopolitical interest and many risks in the Caribbean, and was eager to transfer sovereignty. The independence of Suriname, with a population of barely 400,000 at the time, was simply a matter of negotiations between two governments both aiming for the same outcome. The decision of the Surinamese cabinet to work towards immediate independence was unique: no previous government in Suriname had seriously done this, and a highly divided parliament supported the outcome of the negotiations with the Dutch government with a majority of literally one vote only. No plebiscite was held, and one-third of the population emigrated and settled in the Netherlands, benefiting from the still valid Dutch nationality.

The 'Netherlands Antilles', as the six Dutch Caribbean islands were known at the time, chose a different trajectory. Whereas since the early 1970s the Dutch government insisted that this six-island entity should become a sovereign state, the mood on the islands was completely opposite. There was a consistent refusal to cut the umbilical cord with the former metropolis, as well as decreasing enthusiasm for keeping the six islands together. It took the Dutch long to accept that independence could not be imposed on the islands, and that the centrifugal tendencies could not be kept in check. But fragmentation of the Netherlands Antilles was the outcome anyway. In 1996, Aruba reached a separate status within the Kingdom but outside of the Netherlands Antilles. In 2010 the latter entity was dissolved altogether. The Dutch got precisely what their politicians had not wanted: the Kingdom remained trans-Atlantic, and the six-island Antilles has dissolved.

The 1954 *Statuut* has remained the constitutive document regarding relations between the Netherlands and the Dutch Caribbean. Thus, the four countries presently constituting the Kingdom – Aruba, Curaçao, St. Maarten and the Netherlands itself – are autonomous in internal affairs, but Kingdom affairs are decided upon by the government of the Kingdom dominated by the Dutch cabinet. Clearly this is not a perfect postcolonial arrangement. There is a political, economic, and demographic asymmetry, and in addition there are also considerable cultural differences between the European and Caribbean parts of the Kingdom. This is not a structure without its drawbacks and tensions, and one may think of this continuity from colonial to postcolonial, with its persistence of non-sovereign polities in the Antilles, as a new form of colonialism.

Yet over the past decades, overwhelming majorities on all of the six islands have consistently voted for a prolongation of the postcolonial linkage embodied in the trans-Atlantic Kingdom. The arguments are clear, as we will discuss in more detail below. Antilleans feel that the Kingdom guarantees democracy, human rights and liberties, and territorial integrity; provides development funds and makes the islands a more trustworthy focus of foreign investments; and appreciate that Dutch citizenship implies the right of abode in the Netherlands and in the European Union at large, encompassing access to high-quality education, a large labor market as well as the extensive medical and welfare provisions of the metropolis. Pragmatism apparently prevails over nationalist ideology and the desire to relinquish ties with the former colonizer.

Dutch Caribbean views about the constitutional status

Plebiscites and referenda often give rise to controversies about the choice and formulation of options given (LeDuc 2003, Suksi 1993). In official plebiscites, the metropolis has a prior and decisive say in delimiting the margins of acceptable change. This underlines metropolitan hegemony and the continuities between the colonial and postcolonial periods. But then again, it is worth reminding that not one single transfer of sovereignty in Caribbean history was preceded by a referendum, not even in the post-World War Two era. There were no plebiscites preceding the transfer of sovereignty to the former colonies of the British West Indies. As for Suriname, its ruling pro-independence coalition refused to organize one out of well-founded fears of rejection, and was quietly supported in this by a Dutch government keen on an immediate transfer of sovereignty.

As for the Dutch Caribbean, the proclamation of the *Statuut* in December 1954 had been the result of political negotiations by democratically elected politicians, but there was not a direct vote on the outcome of these, either in the Caribbean or the Netherlands. According to some legal scholars, the fact that the *Statuut* was never formally approved in a popular vote is problematic from a democratic perspective, and undermines its legitimacy (Duijf and Soons 2011). While no plebiscite would ever be organized in the Netherlands or Suriname about (post)colonial issues, several were held in the Dutch Antilles, however. The first official

referendums date from 1993-1994 and several more followed. In addition, there were several extensive surveys which help us tracing developments over time.

In Table 1, the support for independence as expressed in various referendums and opinion polls between 1974 and 2015 has been presented. The interpretation of general trends is slightly complicated, as most referendums about constitutional affairs addressed two different issues at the same time: the question of sovereignty and the structure of the Netherlands Antilles. The overall picture is clear regarding the first issue. On the one hand, there is an overall pattern of low support for independence. The one apparent exception pertains to Aruba in 1977, but it is clear that the option of ‘independence’ was primarily meant to signify a secession from the Netherlands Antilles, rather than from the transatlantic Kingdom (Alofs and Merckies 2001). This is confirmed by the sharp drop of the pro-independence vote after attainment of the separate autonomous country status in 1986.

Table 1: Dutch Caribbean: Support for full independence²

	Aruba	Bonaire	Curaçao	Saba	St. Eustatius	St. Maarten
1974	28 %	-	14 %	-	-	-
1977	82 %	-	-	-	-	-
1985	10 %	-	12 %	-	-	-
1993-94	0.5 %	0.2 %	0.5 %	0.5 %	0.2 %	6.3 %
1998	5.2 %	1.8 %	6.6 %	0.0 %	1.5 %	15.3 %
2000	-	-	-	-	-	14.4 %
2004-05	-	0.5 %	4.8 %	0.8 %	0.6 %	-
2015	7.4 %	2.6 %	14.4 %	3.2 %	7.3 %	-

On the other hand, while the pro-independence vote was low in the 1970s (apart from Aruba, 1977) and 1980s, and even dropped afterwards throughout the 1990s and 2000s, there is a slight but nevertheless remarkable increase of this preference in 2015. This, we assume, reflects an uneasiness with the growing role of Dutch government and visibility of Dutch people on the islands.

As for the structure of the Netherlands Antilles, the picture is a bit more complicated. Aruban separatism was strong from the start – in fact pre-dates the *Statuut* – and remained so consistently and unequivocally until the present. After the Aruban secession in 1986, the

² The results for 1977, 1993-94, 2000 and 2004-05 pertain to government-organized plebiscites. The results for 1998 ([omitted]) and 2015 ([omitted]) were taken from two large-scale surveys. The results for 1974 and 1985 were derived from smaller opinion polls (see [omitted]).

remaining Antilles-of-five initially preferred the status quo, even in St. Maarten which had taken the place of Aruba as second largest island. But once St. Maarten's population, urged to do so by local politicians, voted for secession in 2000, the fragile construction collapsed and even the voters in Curaçao itself opted the status of autonomous country in the Kingdom. The inhabitants of the three smallest islands (Bonaire, St. Eustatius, and Saba) had little effective choice. While Bonaireans and Sabans opted for direct ties with the Netherlands, only Statians continued to express their vain hopes for prolongation of the Netherlands Antilles.³

Five years after the reset at 10/10/10, there is a considerable degree of continuity, including some nostalgia: while only seven per cent of the Arubans would prefer a return of the six-island Netherlands Antilles, this option is supported by a quarter to one third of the population of other islands ([omitted]). There is no way back though. The Dutch government has made it clear that it will not consider yet another round of constitutional changes – implicitly underlining its hegemony in the entire process.

One debate that has come up though in recent years is whether the so-called BES islands (**B**onaire, **S**t. **E**ustatius, and **S**aba) really got where they opted for. The number of options given in the recent referenda was limited, and critics have complained that the quasi-municipal arrangements ultimately made for Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba do not correspond to the option of 'direct ties with the Netherlands' offered and preferred in the decisive referendum (Duijf and Soons 2011). This is most strongly the case for St. Eustatius, where over three quarters of voters preferred a return to the Netherlands Antilles in the 2005 referendum, and never expressed a preference for direct ties with the Netherlands (Corbin 2012). A 2014 referendum on this island resulted in approximately 65.5% of votes for 'autonomy', while 32.8% of votes were cast in favor of the municipal status. Since this referendum however did not reach the required voter turnout of 60%, it was declared invalid. A non-binding referendum held in Bonaire in 2015 likewise indicated that two-thirds of all respondents disagreed with the new status, i.e. direct links with the Netherlands, a view confirmed in our survey ([omitted]).

Beyond these issues of constitutional status, there is a host of other questions, the answers to which may help us to understand the dynamics of this particular case on the broader canvas of postcolonial non-sovereignty. To this end, we will compare two large-scale surveys, one co-supervised by one of the authors in the winter of 1997-1998, the second by the other author in the fall of 2015. The first one, published as [omitted], was held in a period when the Dutch had clearly stepped up their engagement with the islands, producing a certain concern among local politicians and populations alike about a loss of autonomy – complaints about Dutch 'recolonization' were already around and have increased since. The

³ Incidentally, while most of the plebiscites about political status organized in the Dutch Caribbean and also elsewhere in the region served as post-hoc evaluations of decisions made earlier on, the sequence of the 2010 constitutional reform was rather unique, with plebiscites (2000, 2004-05) at the start of the process rather than as evaluation of the status quo.

2015 survey in turn was held after three decades of increasing Dutch intervention in Caribbean governance, in a period of serious political bickering, popular discontent and occasionally open protest on several of the islands. Unfortunately, our findings are limited to five of the six islands: results from the survey in St. Maarten had to be discarded because of fraud committed by the interviewers on that island.⁴

The set-up and organization of these two surveys was broadly similar. Both opinion surveys were held by means of paper-and-pencil interviews, conducted at respondents' house addresses by locally recruited interviewers on the islands. In addition, both surveys consisted of a series of closed questions with fixed answer categories, and interviews were held in four different languages (Dutch, English, Papiamentu, and Spanish). Both surveys also addressed broadly similar issues and topics, but the exact formulation of questions and answer categories was often different. This is both a result of political and societal developments as a consequence of which some questions of the 1998 survey had to be reformulated, as well as a pre-test of the 2015 survey that showed a need to restate some of the questions.⁵ Additional, detailed information about the methodological set-up of both opinion surveys can be found in the original publications.

The results of both surveys point to a remarkable divergence in the way questions addressing the material versus the more ideological and/or emotional aspects of the non-sovereign status are answered. We will first discuss the survey results pertaining to the more pragmatic and material (i.e. 'head') characteristics of non-sovereignty, and subsequently pay attention to the answers given to questions about more cultural, emotional and/or ideological (i.e. 'heart') issues.

Head: pragmatic arguments in favor of non-sovereignty

As we discussed above, pragmatic arguments in favor of non-sovereignty often relate to military and judicial protection, nationality and the right of abode, economic development and financial support, and administrative supervision. These four issues were addressed in both the 1998 and the 2015 survey – though judicial protection only indirectly, as an element of administrative supervision. To start with military protection, in Table 2 the percentages of people who indicate that they (strongly) value the role of the Netherlands in protecting the islands have been presented.

⁴ The reported response percentage on St. Maarten was over 90%, which is extremely high and virtually never reported in large-N survey research. The demographic make-up of St. Maarten, comprising a very large population of (undocumented) migrants, makes such a high response rate even more unlikely, and in the 1998 the response rate was only 55% ([omitted]). An impartial check on the fieldwork that was commissioned in the spring of 2016 revealed that most of the alleged interviews had in fact never been held.

⁵ This pre-test was conducted in January 2015, and as part of the test approximately 40 interviews were held on five different islands.

Table 2: Percentage of people who state that Dutch military support is important or necessary

	Aruba	Bonaire	Curaçao	Saba	St. Eustatius	St. Maarten
1998	95.3 %	96.1 %	92.5 %	93.7 %	94.9 %	89.6 %
2015	91.6 %	90.3 %	78.3 %	91.7 %	90.1 %	-

As the table reveals, both in 1998 and in 2015 overwhelming majorities of the island populations considered military support from the Netherlands to be necessary. While the percentages of support in 2015 are slightly lower than in 1998, on all islands except Curaçao over 90% of respondents emphasize the importance of Dutch military support. And even on Curaçao, which is the largest of the six islands, more than three quarters of interviewees continue to stress the need for military support. The somewhat lower percentages of 2015 in comparison to 1998 might result from a slightly different formulation of the question: while the 1998 survey asked respondents whether military support was *important*, the 2015 survey asked respondents if military support was *necessary*. It is plausible that this marginal difference might explain the somewhat lower percentages in 2015: some people might argue that Dutch military support is important, but not strictly necessary for their island.

We asked a broadly similar question about international crime; in table 3 the answers to this question in both surveys have been presented. The results across islands and across time are again very consistent: both in 1998 and in 2015, on all islands over 80% of people indicate that Dutch support against international crime is necessary. While this percentage increased somewhat on Bonaire and St. Eustatius over the past seventeen years, it slightly dropped on Curaçao and Saba. These differences are marginal, however. A comparison with the previous questions reveals that Dutch military support is considered slightly more important than support against international crime: while the former question generally results in over 90% in favor of Dutch support, the question about international crime commonly results in between 80 and 90% support.

Table 3: Percentage of people who state that Dutch support against international crime is necessary

	Aruba	Bonaire	Curaçao	Saba	St. Eustatius	St. Maarten
1998	82.8 %	84.8 %	88.3 %	92.1 %	83.8 %	85.6 %
2015	81.3 %	90.3 %	80.0 %	88.3 %	88.1 %	-

A second issue we addressed is financial support. While there may be other, more indirect economic and financial benefits of non-sovereignty, we considered financial support from

the metropolitan country (the Netherlands) to be the most tangible manifestation of this issue. In both the 1998 and 2015 survey, we inquired if respondents consider continuing Dutch financial support necessary: the results have been presented in table 4.

Table 4: Percentage of people who state that continuing Dutch financial support is necessary

	Aruba	Bonaire	Curaçao	Saba	St. Eustatius	St. Maarten
1998	91.5 %	94.5 %	94.2 %	96.3 %	94.9 %	81.5 %
2015	88.0 %	88.6 %	83.4 %	92.6 %	89.4 %	-

Again, overwhelming majorities of peoples on all islands agree that Dutch financial support is necessary. The figures for 2015 are slightly lower than for 1998, but this might again be the result of a small difference in answer categories: while the 1998 survey only offers two answer categories ('yes' and 'no') for this question, the 2015 survey offers an intermediate alternative ('not necessary, but also not unnecessary'). It is possible that some people answered the 1998 question with 'yes' because they were faced with a binary choice, whereas they actually preferred an intermediate answer. This option was provided in the 2015 survey. That being said, in 2015 over 80% of people on all islands consider enduring financial support from the metropolitan Netherlands necessary. The results also appear to show a population effect: on the smallest islands (Bonaire, Saba, and St. Eustatius) the percentages are even higher than on the larger ones, possibly indicating that the inhabitants of Aruba, Curaçao and St. Maarten feel their islands have a greater degree of economic independence, and more opportunities for economic development.

Third, in both surveys a question was asked about the importance people attach to the right of abode. The results are presented in table 5.

Table 5: Percentage of people who state that their right to live in the Netherlands is important

	Aruba	Bonaire	Curaçao	Saba	St. Eustatius	St. Maarten
1998	81.7 %	81.9 %	78.7 %	78.8 %	84.8 %	68.6 %
2015	77.3 %	58.2 %	69.6 %	70.4 %	50.4 %	-

The figures of table 5 reveal a significant difference between the answers given in 1998 and 2015. Since the formulation of the question and the answer categories provided are virtually similar, this cannot explain the difference. While majorities on all islands continue to consider the right of abode important, on Bonaire and especially St. Eustatius this is now only a small majority. And while around 70% of Arubans, Curaçaoans, and Sabans continue

to feel that the right to live in the Netherlands is important, also on these islands this figure dropped significantly in comparison to 1998. We might assume that this decrease might be related to stories circulating about a growth of xenophobia in the Netherlands, to misgivings about the Dutch in general ('I don't like the way they behave on my island, but here at least they are a minority'), or a combination of both. But we have not conducted follow-up research on this.

Finally, in both surveys a question was asked about Dutch administrative supervision. For this issue, the 2015 question differed markedly from the question that was asked in the 1998 survey: while the 1998 survey asked respondents if the Netherlands should continue to safeguard the rule of law and democracy on the island, the 2015 survey asked if people think that Dutch administrative supervision is desirable. The latter question obviously envisions a broader and more proactive supervisory role of the Netherlands, and might therefore yield more negative responses, especially if supervision evokes connotations of undue control or dominance. In the 1998 survey, people were also asked if the Netherlands interferes too much with the administration of the island. In order to get a more complete overview of people's attitudes towards Dutch administrative supervision, both questions are presented in table 6. Question 1998a addresses the Dutch role in safeguarding democracy and the rule of law, and 1998b addresses Dutch interference with the island administration. For question 1998b, the percentages of people who disagree that there is too much Dutch administrative interference have been presented.

Table 6: Percentage of people in favor of Dutch administrative supervision

	Aruba	Bonaire	Curaçao	Saba	St. Eustatius	St. Maarten
1998a	86.4 %	87.4 %	85.2 %	91.5 %	85.4 %	70.9 %
1998b	48.7 %	52.4 %	50.7 %	73.5 %	75.8 %	47.9 %
2015	75.4 %	48.6 %	61.0 %	60.8 %	31.1 %	-

The 1998 figures point to an evident discrepancy between people's attitudes towards the safeguarding of democracy and rule of law on the one hand, and significant Dutch administrative interference on the other hand. While large majorities on all six islands indicate that they value the Dutch role in guaranteeing democracy and the rule of law, much significant minorities believe that the Netherlands does interfere too much with the administration of their island. In line with the head versus heart dilemma, this shows that while people generally value the more passive safeguarding role of the Netherlands, they often object to perceived Dutch attempts to control the way in which the islands are administered. The 2015 question, which can arguably be seen as an intermediate between the two 1998 questions, also receives in-between answers on Aruba and Curaçao, where considerable majorities indicate that they appreciate Dutch administrative supervision.

However, the answers patterns of the three smallest islands are very remarkable. On Bonaire, Saba, and St. Eustatius, which since 2010 experienced a strong increase in Dutch administrative supervision, the support for the supervisory role of the Netherlands has faded significantly. Support for Dutch administrative supervision is now weaker here than on the two larger islands, and only on Saba do a majority of people still support Dutch administrative supervision. On St. Eustatius, which in June 2015 was placed under higher supervision by the Dutch government on the basis of metropolitan accusations of financial mismanagement and lack of good governance, less than a third of the respondents are now in favor of Dutch administrative supervision.

Perhaps to a greater extent than military protection, financial support, and the right of abode, administrative supervision is likely to raise sensations of (neo-)colonialism and Dutch dominance. In this regard, of the four ‘head-related’ issues that we discussed in this paragraph, administrative supervision arguably comes closest to also being a ‘heart-related’ issue. Nonetheless, support for Dutch administrative supervision remained reasonably high on all islands, with the partial exception of St. Eustatius.

Heart: criticism of the Dutch presence and role

In this section we will examine three issues that pertain more to the emotional or ideational aspects of the relationship between the metropolitan Netherlands and the Dutch Caribbean islands. We will compare questions from the 1998 and 2015 surveys that address 1) people’s feelings towards the Dutch monarchy, 2) the perceived knowledge of, and respect for, the island cultures among Dutch politicians, and 3) the attitudes towards Dutch inhabitants and tourists on the islands.

Starting with the monarchy, both surveys asked respondents to state their attitude towards the Dutch monarch; in 1998 this was Queen Beatrix, and in 2015 this was King Willem-Alexander. While people might have different attitudes towards these two different rulers, their composure towards the islands has been broadly similar, and the questions therefore provide a good estimate of people’s feelings of affection towards the royal dynasty that symbolically brings all subjects of the Kingdom together in one imagined community. In table 7, the results for both surveys have been presented.

Table 7: Percentage of people with a positive attitude towards the Dutch monarch

	Aruba	Bonaire	Curaçao	Saba	St. Eustatius	St. Maarten
1998	71.9 %	62.3 %	56.3 %	86.2 %	89.9 %	74.5 %
2015	80.2 %	63.8 %	67.8 %	62.1 %	39.7 %	-

While the overall results indicate that the inhabitants of all six islands have a positive attitude towards the monarchy, there are divergences between the islands and across time. In 1998, people on the three Windward Islands (Saba, St. Eustatius, and St. Maarten) clearly had a more positive opinion about Queen Beatrix than the people on the three Leeward Islands. In 2015, this seems to have been reversed. More specifically, while Arubans and Curaçaoans appear to have become increasingly positive about the monarch in 2015, on Saba and especially St. Eustatius a profound drop in the popularity of the monarch can be observed. While close to 90% of Sabans and Statians had a positive attitude about Queen Beatrix, only 62% of Sabans and 40% of Statians have a positive attitude towards King Willem-Alexander. The only plausible explanation of this divergence between the two largest and the three smallest islands seems to be their different constitutional status since 2010. The BES-islands are now special municipalities of the Netherlands, and objections to the increasingly dominant role of the Netherlands on these islands appear to have caused an analogous drop in support for the Dutch monarch. Perhaps islanders even blame the present king personally for not interfering on their behalf.

In both the 1998 and 2015 surveys, questions were asked about the knowledge of the local culture on the islands among Dutch politicians, as well as their levels of respect for the local culture. In table 8, the answers to the questions about knowledge have been presented, and in table 9 the answers to the question about respect.

Table 8: Percentage of people who think that Dutch politicians have knowledge of island culture

	Aruba	Bonaire	Curaçao	Saba	St. Eustatius	St. Maarten
1998	26.5 %	25.9 %	29.9 %	18.5 %	15.7 %	6.5 %
2015	15.5 %	3.1 %	10.1 %	9.5 %	5.9 %	-

Table 9: Percentage of people who think that Dutch politicians have respect for island culture

	Aruba	Bonaire	Curaçao	Saba	St. Eustatius	St. Maarten
1998	41.1 %	45.3%	42.8 %	63.0 %	50.5 %	21.4 %
2015	19.6 %	5.8 %	11.2 %	14.6 %	6.0 %	-

The answers given to these two questions show an unequivocal and worrying pattern: over the past seventeen years, island populations have become much more negative about the perceived level of knowledge about, and respect for their islands. While the 1998 – 2015 decrease regarding the level of perceived knowledge is about 15% on average, this is

approximately 37% for the respect question. And regarding the respect question, the figures from the BES islands point to a much sharper drop in the perceived level of respect than the figures on Aruba and Curaçao. Precisely on these three islands, the Dutch dominance and presence has strongly increased in recent years. While the level of Dutch engagement on Aruba and Curaçao had not changed as much over the past seventeen years, on these islands too people perceive much less knowledge and respect on the part of Dutch politicians. In sum, these questions clearly reveal that the islanders' emotional antipathy towards the Dutch government has strongly increased, and that the 'heart'-related attitudes towards the non-sovereign relationship appear to have become much more negative.

A third 'heart' question pertains to the presence of Dutch inhabitants and tourists on the islands. This question was not asked in the 1998 survey, at a time when the physical presence of Dutch people was much less significant than it is today. Thus we cannot make cross-temporal comparisons for this issue. In the 2015 survey, respondents were asked to respond to two propositions, which they could rate as either true or false. One proposition was that "too many Dutch people live on this island", and the other one was that "too many Dutch tourists come to this island".

Table 10: Percentage of people who think that there are too many Dutch inhabitants and tourists on the island

	Aruba	Bonaire	Curaçao	Saba	St. Eustatius
2015 inhabitants	42.4 %	73.7 %	54.6 %	24.3 %	35.1 %
2015 tourists	32.9 %	45.3 %	45.8 %	8.3 %	8.6 %

The results point to some striking differences between the five surveyed islands. On Bonaire and Curaçao, where the increase in the number of Dutch inhabitants has been the most profound, over half of respondents feel that there are too many Dutch people living on the island. These figures are much lower on Aruba, Saba, and St. Eustatius, although the proposition is still supported by a considerable minority of these islands' populations. Regarding Dutch tourists, a clear division between the two Windward Islands (Saba and St. Eustatius) and the other three islands can be identified, which is in all likelihood a result of the fact that the ABC-islands experience a much greater influx of Dutch tourists than the Windward Islands. In combination, the results therefore show that the antipathy towards Dutch inhabitants and tourists grows parallel to their numbers. These negative attitudes towards Dutch inhabitants and tourists are likely to increase further if migration and tourism arrivals continue to rise.

While the analysis of 'head'-related questions in the previous section revealed that the island populations continue to perceive and appreciate the more material elements of the non-sovereign relation with the Netherlands, the analysis of 'heart'-related questions points

in a different direction. In comparison to 1998, inhabitants of all islands seem to have acquired a much more negative opinion about the immaterial aspects of their islands' relationships with the Netherlands.

Conclusions and implications

The overall outcomes of both the 1998 and the 2015 surveys point to a familiar theme in postcolonial non-sovereign societies: the painful trade-off between head and heart. For all kinds of pragmatic reasons, the people of the Dutch Caribbean islands have a strong preference for a continuation of the present non-sovereign constitutional relations, even if they are well aware that the (European) Netherlands ultimately decides about their fate – at least, as long as they do not opt for full independence. When asked why, island inhabitants offer a range of arguments which are mainly of a pragmatic nature, in 2015 as much as in 1998: financial support, security, the right of abode, and administrative supervision.

When asked whether their lives have improved during the five years after the new constitutional arrangements were implemented – and hence Dutch presence increased – Antilleans express slightly negative views. When asked about their expectations for the next five years though, the overall opinion is somewhat brighter ([omitted]). But none of this indicates real enthusiasm or optimism. There are widespread feelings of resentment about the nature and impact of the increasingly strong Dutch presence, ranging from economic concerns to issues of culture and identity. Non-sovereignty may thus be an acceptable or even desirable political arrangement from a pragmatic, rational perspective, but at the same time it may be strongly and increasingly resented from a more emotional and/or ideological point of view.

While research similar to ours has not been done on the three Dutch Caribbean autonomous countries, there is one other recent survey available on the three BES-islands (Pommer and Bijl (2015)). Commissioned by the Dutch government as part of the evaluation process of the first lustrum of the new constitutional arrangements, this survey suggests the same ambivalence and very mixed appraisal of the post-2010 development. These results also point to a paradox with worrying consequences for policy makers: over the past years, the Dutch government has made very substantial investments in the BES islands, far more so than in Aruba, Curaçao or St. Maarten. Per capita, the three municipalities received some 10,000 euros annually, easily ten times as much as the Dutch budget for the three Dutch Caribbean countries. Surely this has resulted in improvements in education, public health and infrastructure which are explicitly appreciated, but the recent changes have not erased and possibly even increased private poverty. Moreover, there are apparently widespread feelings of disenfranchisement and relative deprivation that are summed up in angry accusations of 'recolonization', 'modern slavery' and 'apartheid'.

Surely the Dutch governmental return and the stepping up of investments did not stem from an expectations of easy solutions, let alone rewards, but rather from a conviction that

decades of neglect ought to be repaired, in the first place for the good of the Dutch Caribbean population. As it has turned out so far however, results have been mixed, most of all in Bonaire and St. Eustatius, precisely where Dutch presence is most visible. This may serve as a sobering reminder against an implicitly colonial-style, ‘for you but without you’ approach to developmental problems. It also underlines that it is extremely difficult to make one or two steps backwards in the process of decolonization. Opting for integration and complying with all metropolitan standards and practices as the French *départements d’outre mer* did in 1946 is one thing, but it is altogether different to move into that direction after sixty years of autonomy. Paradoxically, this conclusion does underline that after all, for all of its restrictions, the internal autonomy granted to the Dutch Caribbean countries in 1954 did have real significance, and continues to do so today.

The ambiguous attitudes vis-à-vis the non-sovereign status can be observed in other non-sovereign polities as well, in the Caribbean and beyond. Publications about American, British, Danish, French, and New Zealand overseas territories reveal that in all these jurisdictions, the non-sovereign political arrangement is occasionally or permanently contested. While independence movements mostly remain small, and the choice for non-sovereignty remains favored by wide popular majorities, the specific details of the non-sovereign relationship – and in particular the degree of autonomy from the metropolis – continue to raise debates, conflicts, and calls for status changes. Whereas various scholars have praised the non-sovereign status as “combining the best of both worlds” (Baldacchino 2006) or as “superior” to other arrangements (Rezvani 2014), our analysis suggests that at least for the Dutch Caribbean, such assessments underestimate the strong emotional and ideological objections to the non-sovereign relationship that exist among the populations of such territories.

While no former overseas territories have become independent states over the past two decades, there have been myriad changes in the specific non-sovereign status of the British, Danish, Dutch, and French overseas territories. These constant changes show that non-sovereignty is an inherently unstable political outcome, as “status issues in the territories are never fully resolved” (Aldrich and Connell 1998, 24). Whatever the merits of all this institutional and constitutional fine-tuning, it seems that the ambiguities of non-sovereignty will continue to obstruct attempts to arrive at a permanently satisfactory arrangement between metropolitan states and their overseas territories. The heart versus head dilemma is engrained in the latter’s non-sovereign status.

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