

‘The Best of Both Worlds’: Autonomy and Decolonisation in the Caribbean

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**Caribbean Studies Working Paper No.2
(August 2008)**

ISSN: 1756-3178 (on-line)



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In 1960 the UN passed two major resolutions on decolonisation. The first, Resolution 1514 – ‘Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples’ – asserted that “all peoples have the right to self-determination” and that “inadequacy of political, economic, or social unpreparedness should never serve as a pretext for delaying independence”. The second, Resolution 1541, determined that a non-self governing territory could be said to reach a full measure of self-government in three ways: emergence as a sovereign independent state; free association with an independent state; and integration with an independent state. The future for the ‘yet to be decolonised’ Caribbean territories thus lay in one of three options. Two had already been exercised: integration with a sovereign independent state when Guadeloupe, Martinique and French Guiana became *Départements d’Outre Mer* of France in 1946; and free association with an independent state in the adoption of Commonwealth status (*Estado Libre Asociado*) by Puerto Rico in 1952, followed by the promulgation of the Charter of the Kingdom of the Netherlands (*Statuut*) in 1954, extending autonomy to the Netherlands Antilles and Suriname. The third, sovereignty, had yet to be exercised, but beginning in 1962 this was the path eventually followed by the majority of British colonies in the region and Suriname. It also became the preferred path elsewhere in the world with the presumption that in all but a very few exceptional cases self-determination would fully and finally be exercised through sovereign independence.

This presumption began to fade in the ‘British’ Caribbean in the 1980s with the formal return of Anguilla to British colonial status in 1980, followed by the referendum in Bermuda in 1995 in which 74% of those voting opposed independence. Examples elsewhere in the region at around the same time pointing in the same direction were the reluctant agreement by the Dutch to ‘set aside’ their prior understanding that Aruba, after it had achieved a special ‘status aparte’ in the Kingdom in 1985, should proceed to independence ten years later; and the referendum in Puerto Rico in 1993 which showed support for independence stood at just 4.4%. In the French departments the movement favouring independence in Guadeloupe also faded in the late 1980s. The reality in the Caribbean thus became one of ‘continuing metropolitan connection’ for the remaining territories, none of which showed any interest in moving toward independence in the immediate future.

This paper broadly explores the experiences of this period to the present day with a focus on the issue of ‘autonomy’. This arises from the desire of nearly all the remaining ‘territories’, irrespective of metropole and status, to win greater autonomy over their local affairs. As noted above, this is consistent with ‘self-determination’ as defined by the UN in 1960, but as also will be noted later as it presently stands it is by no means the definitive ‘solution’ to the issue of decolonisation that sovereign independence had become. The belief by many of those who favour autonomy that they will through ‘free association’ enjoy ‘the best of both worlds’ i.e. continue to qualify for the many tangible benefits from continuing

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented to the Annual Conference of the Society for Caribbean Studies, Edinburgh in July 2008.

close association with the metropole plus retain the ability to run their own affairs as they see fit, is therefore a contested and ultimately insecure status subject to constant review and revision.

The Current Status of ‘Non-Sovereign’ Caribbean Territories: A Changing Pattern

Utilising the categories listed in UNGA 1541 (1960) the status of the Caribbean territories as of 31 December 2005 was as follows (current population estimates in brackets):

- *Non-Self Governing Territories*: Anguilla (13,600), Bermuda (65,000), British Virgin Islands (22,200), Cayman Islands (42,000), Montserrat (4,483), Turks and Caicos Islands (36,600), United States Virgin Islands (108,612).
- *Self-Governing Territories*: Aruba (100,500), Netherlands Antilles (183,000), Puerto Rico (3,900,000).
- *Integrated Territories*: Guadeloupe and Dependencies (445,000), French Guiana (187,200), Martinique (394,000).

This listing had stayed static since the independence of St Kitts-Nevis from the United Kingdom in 1983 and ‘status aparte’ for Aruba in 1986. However, it is now undergoing change as a result of revisions of status by France and prospectively by the Netherlands.

In the case of France it follows measures to upgrade the dependencies in Guadeloupe to give them ‘enhanced status’ in dealing directly with France. This would mean additions to the integrated territories to include Saint Martin (33,100) and St Barthelemy (6,852) in their own right.

Proposals currently under discussion in the Kingdom of the Netherlands envisage the dissolution of the Netherlands Antilles and the reconfiguration of its five members as follows: as ‘public authorities’ (similar to municipalities) of the Netherlands - Bonaire (11,000), Sint Eustatius (2,300) and Saba (1,400) (integrated territories) - with Curaçao (130,600) and Sint Maarten (30,6000) becoming separate self-governing territories.

These changes reflect two related developments. The first is mounting frustration within the various ‘non-sovereign’ territories with their current status as seen in the day-to-day relations with their respective metropolises. The second is the attraction of autonomy as a ‘developmental model’, which will simultaneously deliver the relatively high standards of living they now enjoy (compared to most sovereign countries in the Caribbean) along with an enhanced ability to govern themselves and to engage in ‘para-diplomacy’ in support of their own interests and distinct identity.

The Attractions of Autonomy

In the last ten years or so a ‘critical revisionist’ school has grown up in the sub-field of small state and island development studies. In contrast to the accepted wisdom, which has highlighted the vulnerability of such states, this school has stressed their robust development performance, and in contrast to the accepted wisdom of the advantages of sovereignty this

school has stressed the benefits of continuing ties to a metropolitan patron. The result is what one of the scholars most involved (McElroy) has called the ‘propensity for dependence’ in small sub-national island jurisdictions. In 2000 he gave a figure to this phenomenon measured as differences in levels of per capita GDP between sovereign and dependent states. In a sample of dependent islands in the Caribbean per capita GDP was US\$11214 as compared to US\$5898 for sovereign independent states (US\$6148 and US\$3218 respectively for the Pacific) (McElroy and Mahoney, 2000). In a more recent study of a sample of sub-national island jurisdictions he reported a GDP of US\$17416 for them as compared to US\$8463 for small sovereign island states (McElroy and Pearce, 2006).

The reasons for this difference between the independent states and non-independent territories is currently under investigation. One reason undoubtedly lies in the high levels of metropolitan support given to non-independent territories by their patron. Geoffrey Bertram (2004), for example, has shown that the growth of per capita GDP of small island economies is explained to a large extent by (a) the closeness of political linkages of each island to a corresponding ‘developed’ metropolitan patron plus (b) the level of per capita GDP in the metropolitan economy. In a sample of 32 island economies he calculates that integrated political status is worth US\$5600-7500 of additional per capita GDP relative to sovereign independent status, and more generally concludes that small islands converge to the income level of their patrons and not to each other within a specific geographic region like the Caribbean or the Pacific.

The other is the exploitation of autonomy. Some non-independent territories have exploited their separate jurisdictional status to create distinct economic advantages for themselves. The examples most readily apparent in the UK are those of the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man who have used their political status as ‘crown dependencies’ to develop a sophisticated offshore finance industry which has given them a higher standard of living than the UK. Many others exist – Godfrey Baldacchino has identified some 115 sub-national island, or mainly island, jurisdictions (SNIJs) worldwide of which 20 are to be found in the Caribbean (including Bermuda but excluding French Guiana). Four of the SNIJs he cites in the Caribbean (Barbuda, Nevis, San Andres y Providencia, Tobago) are linked to independent states in the region and have not yet made much of their distinct status, but many of the others have done do to good effect as evident in their higher per capita incomes.

The essence of autonomy is the realisation of “an ‘arms’ length, customised relationship with a larger, benevolent ‘mainland’ patron” (Baldacchino 2006: 861). It depends on the metropole permitting the development of political capacities in the form of “an ample dose of existing jurisdictional prerogative” (ibid: 860) in the SNIJ, along with the power to conduct ‘para-diplomacy’ involving separate representation in a variety of international organisations, including crucially regional ones. For its part, the SNIJ articulates a distinct regional or ethnic identity short of national identity, along with the “the defence of minority rights and the promotion of minority identity” (ibid), which allows it to identify its particular interests as distinct from those of the metropole.

In several studies Baldacchino has identified five features of autonomy which confer advantage in economic policy (ibid: 855-859):

- a. *Powers over finance, mainly banking and insurance.* The key elements here are confidentiality and the power not to tax. Most offshore centres (OFCs) combine the two along with innovative financial instruments to act as major centres for banks, insurance

companies and international business corporations who seek a low tax environment. The Western Hemisphere is host to 22 such OFCs, 18 of which are in the Caribbean and 8 of which are SNIJs (Anguilla, Aruba, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Montserrat, Netherlands Antilles, Turks and Caicos Islands).

- b. *Powers over environmental policy, particularly natural resources.* The importance of natural resources in small islands and small SNIJs, where resources are necessarily limited by size, is obvious. That does not mean that some are not blessed with high value products but the benefits to be obtained from such resources might not automatically be acknowledged unless specific recognition is given to the interests of the particular territory in which they are found through legislation or specific instruments such as ‘special trust funds’.
- c. *Powers over access, particularly in relation to air and sea transportation.* Small island states and SNIJs face higher transportation costs than larger countries. In reality, there is only a limited amount of action that such states and SNIJs can take to rectify the situation, but one is to capitalise on presumed disadvantage by using the specific circumstances of ‘remoteness’ and ‘jurisdiction’ to advantage, traditionally seen in the establishment of shipping registers and the sale of postage stamps, or in more modern forms in the exploitation of communications technology.
- d. *Powers over free movements of persons.* Small island states and SNIJs often suffer from acute population problems. Population density can be high and opportunities limited leading to high levels of out-migration. At the same time, such places are often promoted as tourist destinations and attract retirees. Indeed, there is some evidence that SNIJs are now net recipients of migrants (McElroy and Pearce, 2006: 534). The need to manage this to the advantage of the SNIJ is a major issue and one which characteristically expresses itself in the creation of specific citizenship status and rights.
- e. *Powers over tourism policy.* Many small island states and SNIJs enjoy the image of a highly desirable ‘paradise’ destination. The SNIJs can also enjoy positive benefits from the metropolitan country in the form of ease of travel (common currency and passport), special tax and duty concessions, financial support for transport and communication structure, and access to investment capital in the tourism sector. The means to develop their own ‘island brand’ through selective marketing and tourist promotion is important to differentiate and sustain the product in a very competitive market.

The claim to and exercise of autonomy can lead to acrimony and conflict between the SNIJ and the metropolis. Baldacchino (2004: 81) notes that: “Contestation over ‘who does what’ in

these policy areas has typically been tense and may itself trigger demands for more self rule and autonomy, or its withdrawal or its renegotiation in some other way between the parties concerned". Indeed, he claims that "the intermittent willingness to test the 'shared-rule versus self-rule' formula constitutes the hard core of local politics" in SNIJs with the electorate judging "local political leaders mainly on their ability to work and negotiate the balance of power with the larger player in the political dyad" (79). This is certainly the case in all the 'non-sovereign' Caribbean countries and has served as the main driver for increased autonomy in nearly all of them in recent years.

The Demands for Greater Autonomy in the Caribbean

The issue of autonomy is therefore intrinsically bound up with the relationship of the territory with the metropole. It is a subject of continual 'negotiation' between the two partners with an ever-changing content and agenda. The main issues for each Caribbean 'grouping' is set out below in approximate ascending order from the least autonomous to the most.

France

The 'decolonisation' of the French Caribbean dates back to March 1946 when the Constituent Assembly in France voted to transform Guadeloupe, Martinique and French Guiana into departments of France equivalent to those in mainland France. This had been a long-standing goal of the French left with bills being introduced to this effect as far back as 1890. The aim of political integration was political and social equality along with levels of economic development equivalent to that of mainland France. Given the historical and contemporary differences between the mainland and the new overseas departments it was recognised that some differences would continue, for example in social provision, with additional powers granted to the General Council and the Prefect in each 'overseas' department to support the transition.

The slow pace of transformation led to the left in the DOM adopting a policy of autonomy in the late 1950s, spearheaded by the creation of the Martinican Progressive Party (PPM) in 1958 with Aimé Césaire, who had been the leading advocate of departmentalisation in 1946, as its leader. The 1960s and 1970s saw autonomy being discussed by all sections of political opinion in the Caribbean DOM but at no time did the majority wish to end the special association with France or proceed to independence, although a vocal minority was very active in this cause.

In March 1982 the newly elected Mitterrand government introduced a decentralisation law giving "far greater autonomy in decision-making by sharing administrative and budgetary tasks between central and local authorities" (Daniel 2005: note 10, 81). This included the eventual creation of an elected Regional Council alongside the existing elected General Council for each department in the Caribbean. The Regional Council was charged with the promotion of economic, social, cultural and scientific development and given limited powers to conduct discussions with other Caribbean countries. The General Council continued to have competencies for some educational, economic and social matters as well as rural infrastructure resulting in an often overlapping set of responsibilities with the Regional Council, leading to a confusing and complex decision-making and administrative process. Nevertheless, decentralisation was enough for Césaire to change the policy of the PPM from one of autonomy to one of working within the newly created system.

The issue of autonomy, however, did not go away but became more concentrated in the literary and cultural sphere with the themes of recognising and promoting a specific Creole identity for the Caribbean DOM. *Créolité*, argues Miles (2001: 50) “emphasised the multicultural diversity of French West Indian society, ostensibly displacing both *négritude* (which privileged the African component of the identity) and assimilation (which had elevated French ancestry above all other identity markers)”. It promoted the use of the Creole language and inevitably set down political markers for distinctive policies to be followed in the DOM. As noted earlier, this had always been an element of ‘integration’ and as early as the mid 1950s distinct Antillean political movements and parties had been formed to distinguish the Caribbean DOM from the mainland parties. The main issue at that time was political and economic equality with mainland France and while this remains a goal the economic growth of the DOM and the extension of social provision to it, notably the equalisation of the minimum wage in the Caribbean DOM with that of mainland France in 1996, has displaced that aspect in favour of the more diffuse identity agenda of ‘difference’.

In 2000 the Jospin government passed a law that permitted the DOM to look again at their status. It encouraged the General Council and the Regional Council in each Caribbean DOM to gather together in an informal Congress and make recommendations. In both Guadeloupe and Martinique the recommendation was for the unification of the separate councils in a single elected body and in French Guiana a request for greater autonomy on the lines of that given to the Pacific territory of New Caledonia. These initiatives were overtaken, however, by the enactment in March 2003 of a new decentralisation law by the new conservative government in France. This introduced two new articles in the Constitution governing the overseas territories. Article 73 was directed at the Caribbean DOM and saw the future as continued integration with France with relatively little autonomy while Article 74 established a *Collectivité d’Outre Mer* (COM) allowing for more autonomy, providing the territory remained within the Republic. Four referenda in December 2003 followed the changes. In Guadeloupe and Martinique the elected representatives submitted again their proposals for a single elected body but were rejected by the voters with 73% against in Guadeloupe and 51% against in Martinique. In St Barthelemy and St Martin voters overwhelmingly opted for COM status allowing them specific adaptations of policy regarding tax and immigration. Their new status, which now permits direct communication with metropolitan France rather than through Guadeloupe as before, took effect in 2007.

These experiences show both the persistence and the limitations of autonomy in the Caribbean DOM. Autonomy remains an issue, but in a contradictory sense. The territories want to exercise autonomy but also remain within France. The main reason is the economic benefit which France provides by way of public transfers worth some Euro1.3 billion (3,347 per capita) for Martinique in 2002 and Euro 1.8 billion (4,055 per capita) in Guadeloupe (Daniel 2005: 62) – of vital importance to maintain living standards given a rate of unemployment in excess of 25%, concentrated in those below the age of 35. The main way to access these finances is to exercise autonomy or as Constant puts it (echoing Baldacchino) “the issue of political status has been the main political resource at the disposal of the periphery in bargaining with the centre” (2001: 91). It thus pays the DOM not to fully resolve the status issue and so long as the French state permits autonomy, for whatever reason, the DOM will exploit it. Indeed ‘autonomy’ becomes even more important if the model of ‘*Tricolore* development’, as practised in the last 60 years, is coming under strain and possibly to an end, as Matthew Bishop (2008) has recently persuasively argued.

The United Kingdom

The sole method of decolonisation of British colonies has been the grant of sovereign independence. The one partial exception has been the creation of the ‘Associated States’ in the six small countries of the Eastern Caribbean (Antigua and Barbuda, St. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla, Dominica, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Grenada) in 1967. While this was not ‘decolonisation’ in the strict sense of the term, it was similar to ‘free association with an independent state’ since it gave the island countries the freedom to run their internal affairs (i.e. a large measure of autonomy) while reserving defence and foreign relations to the UK. It was not judged a ‘success’ since problems quickly emerged, notably in the case of Anguilla, which ‘de facto’ separated from St Kitts in 1967 and ran its own affairs until 1969 when the UK took over its temporary administration, eventually returning it to formal British colonial status in 1980. In essence, ‘Associated Statehood’ left Britain with responsibility (since it was not sovereign decolonisation) but no executive authority to discharge it. As such, interest in applying ‘associated statehood’ to colonies elsewhere quickly faded and by 1973 the Foreign Secretary informed Bermuda “that Britain was not willing to create any more associated arrangements” (Killingray, 2005: 9).

This left the UK in a dilemma over its remaining colonies. The favoured option was to entice them to move to sovereign independence, which was accomplished for all the ‘Associated States’ plus the Bahamas and Belize in the Caribbean by 1983. But the remaining colonies in the region, with the partial exception of Bermuda and briefly the Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI) and Montserrat, showed no interest in independence. This gradually led to a lowering of expectations and a review of policy toward the dependent territories undertaken by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) in 1986-87. The review examined factors for and against independence; the costs and benefits of the dependent territories; a range of future statuses; and the requirements underlying further moves toward independence. The general conclusion was that the dependent territories would remain with that status for the foreseeable future. An announcement to that effect was made to the House of Commons by Tim Eggar, the minister responsible for them, in December 1987: “The review concluded that we should not seek in any way to influence opinion in the territories on the question of independence, but we remain ready to respond positively when this is the clearly and constitutionally expressed wish of the people” (Sutton, 2001: 48).

The issue was next revisited in a substantial manner following the election of the ‘New Labour’ government in 1997. A review was initiated soon after it took office and reported in a White Paper entitled *Partnership for Progress and Prosperity* released in March 1999. The White Paper reported that no territory wanted independence although independence would remain an option. Other constitutional arrangements were considered, including integration with the UK and Crown Dependency status similar to the Channel islands, but rejected in favour of a lightly revised and modernised relationship built on existing practice. The residents of the now renamed Overseas Territories (not Dependent Territories as before) were to be offered British citizenship, which had been taken from most of them in 1981. Both of these were highly symbolic acts, demonstrating a commitment by the UK government to the Britishness of its overseas possessions. Other reforms included a new department established within the FCO to look exclusively to their affairs along with a minister within the FCO to oversee them. An Overseas Territories Consultative Council was also established, comprising the chief minister or equivalent from each overseas territory, to meet annually in London under the chairmanship of the FCO minister. In return for these changes, plus a commitment of defence and development aid as a priority should it prove to be a necessity (as in the case of Montserrat), the overseas territories were expected to meet standards set by the

UK government and international treaty obligations. These included effective regulation of their offshore financial centres; observance of human rights; and good governance. All three have proven to be controversial in the Caribbean and to generate conflict and dissent between the locally elected territorial governments, the British appointed Governor and the FCO in London (Clegg, 2005), raising questions on the future political status of the territories.

This issue was starkly drawn in 2003. In May 2003 the UN Decolonisation Committee convened a regional seminar on non-self governing territories in Anguilla. In reviewing future options for the territories the idea of 'free association' surfaced in discussions generating interest among the Caribbean participants. All of the Caribbean overseas territories were at the time undergoing a process of constitutional review, on the prompting of the FCO, with the aim of devolving greater powers to the locally elected assemblies. Montserrat in its review had already expressed an interest in 'free association' and others began to see some merit in it. This raised alarm bells in London where it was seen as a return to the problems of the Associated States experience. Bill Rammell, the minister responsible, wrote to a number of chief ministers in the territories in the middle of 2003 stating that the UK was not bound by Resolution 1541 which would leave the UK government "responsible for good governance in the territories as well as with certain international obligations without the power to ensure these things" (Fergus, 2005: 42). He followed it up with a memorandum to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee in October stating that: "the complexity of Government business, particularly following the terrorist attacks of 11 September, is in fact tending increasingly to blur the distinction between domestic and foreign policy, requiring greater UK involvement in some areas which hitherto territory governments may have considered their own preserve" (cited in Clegg, 2005: 147). In short, the UK government expected their powers to increase, not diminish, and correspondingly the role of the Governor to be maintained and possibly enlarged, with the Governor taking a proactive role "in areas such as contingency planning, aviation and maritime safety/security, financial regulation, management of the economy, the environment and human rights" (ibid).

The position of the British government was repeated in a visit to the TCI by the new minister with responsibility for the territories, Lord Triesman in 2006. In the light of continuing discussions in the TCI on 'free association' he decisively rejected it on the now familiar grounds of responsibility without power. He also claimed that integration in the UK (similar to the Isle of Wight) would "not be an option that would find favour in the territories. Nor does it in the UK". Lastly, he stated that the UK did not vote for Resolution 1541 "and does not regard itself as bound by it". (Triesman 2006). In effect this leaves the Caribbean territories with little option if they dissent but to proceed to independence. None of them currently want this, although as Sir Howard Fergus (2005: 42-43) noted several years ago it should not be entirely discounted. Meanwhile, the issue of 'who is responsible for what' will not go away. It remains, in the words of the former Deputy Head of the FCO's Overseas Territories Department "a constructive tension...which requires careful handling on both sides" (Osborne, 2005: 27). The recently enacted constitutions in the British Virgin Islands and the TCI, which maintain the powers of the Governor and provide that he/she continues to chair the executive, demonstrate that in this case the UK government maintains the upper hand. But equally, in conceding some greater powers to local assemblies and the chief minister the UK government ensures that the territories will return again before long for more, so raising the issue of autonomy once again.

The United States

Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands are formally identified as ‘unincorporated territories’ that ‘belong to but are not part of the US’, which means the US has ultimate control over them. Beyond this, however, their histories are very different as has been the status debate within them. In the US Virgin islands the debate has been muted with little or no progress other than the introduction of an elected governor in 1970 and an inconclusive (because low-turnout made it non-binding) plebiscite in 1993 which saw 80.4% voting for continued or enhanced territorial status with the US, 13.2% wanting integration as a state of the union, and 4.9% favouring free association and independence. A plebiscite in Puerto Rico in the same year saw a similar level of support for independence at 4.4% but 46.3% favoured statehood (as a state of the Union comparable to Hawaii) and 48.6% favoured an enhanced or more autonomous Commonwealth status. The almost equal levels of support for the two very different options of integration or autonomy (Commonwealth status) has meant a more intense and continuing debate in Puerto Rico and a stalemate over attempts to resolve it.

In 1952 Puerto Ricans voted for Commonwealth status, which provided for a large measure of self-government in local affairs, and in the following year the US successfully petitioned the UN to remove it from the list of colonial territories claiming the island had achieved self-rule. In 1972 the Decolonisation Committee and the General Assembly reversed the decision but subsequent action by the US has blocked any movement on it. Within Puerto Rico itself, however, there has been a lively debate on the issue from the beginning which spilled over into the US itself in 1989 when the Senate opened, if only briefly, hearings on the status issue. This was followed in 1993 with the first of several attempts by Senator Don Young to seek a solution to status through the introduction of bills in the US Congress. The first two attempts were abandoned but in 1998 a third version passed by one vote in the House of Representatives but failed to be considered in the Senate. Had it been enacted it would have given the people of Puerto Rico the choice of three main paths: “an integrative path leading to statehood within the American union; a path towards a sovereign status which could lead to free association or to independence and a third choice represented by the maintenance of the Commonwealth status” (Gamaliel Ramos and Israel Rivera, 2001: 5). The views of the Puerto Rican people themselves on the status issue that year were sought in another plebiscite. This recorded 0.1% favouring the present Commonwealth option, 2.8% independence or free association, 46.5% statehood and 50.3% ‘none of the other options’. The failure of the statehood option to make any progress following five years of government by the statehood party (NPP) in Puerto Rico, along with the dissatisfaction of the majority with the status alternatives they were being offered, pointed to the real difficulties confronting any resolution of the differences in Puerto Rico. Compounding it was the problem of opposition in the US Congress to any idea of statehood in Puerto Rico that allowed them in any way to be different from existing US states, for example as in the wish to retain Spanish as one of the two official languages of the state (Alegria Ortega, 2001). In the period since the situation has not changed that much.

The two issues that are at the heart of difficulties are cultural identity and economic development. Duany and Pantojas-Garcia argue that while the majority of Puerto Ricans share much in common such as history, language, culture and territory they make a distinction between “cultural nationalism that conceives of a nation as a creative force” and “political nationalism which equates the nation with the state (2005: 24). “Political nationalism” they assert “is a minority position in contemporary Puerto Rico” while “cultural nationalism is the dominant ideology of the Commonwealth government, the intellectual elite, and numerous cultural institutions on the Island as well as in the diaspora” (ibid) and as such enjoys majority

support. The interest of Puerto Ricans at home and abroad, it follows (more than 50% of all persons of Puerto Rican origin live outside the territory, overwhelmingly in the USA), is to retain and foster their identity as Puerto Ricans, which they can do without having to create a separate sovereign state. More to the point, Duany and Pantojas-Garcia argue the 'sovereignty' option is becoming ever more marginal as the Puerto Rican people have become "increasingly transnational in its residential locations, cultural practices, and values" (ibid: 46) leading them to increasingly identify with cultural nationalism rather than political nationalism. In effect, this narrows the status options considerably and inevitably points to simply one: some form of 'free association' since integration on present terms with the US would deny cultural nationalism while sovereign independence would not necessarily lead to its development along modern 'transnational' lines.

A very similar argument can be made on economic development. The creation of Commonwealth political status by the Commonwealth party (PDP) was accompanied by a very successful economic development model which cleverly exploited the benefits of association with the US in the form of common defence, common currency and common citizenship with the ability to exercise autonomy through selective application of federal labour laws and regulations, federal tax exemptions and special quotas, and local tax exemptions (ibid: 31). In the 1950s and 1960s this delivered high levels of growth (although unemployment never fell below 10%), but in the 1970s the economy began experiencing difficulties which by the 1980s and beyond was delivering very low growth rates and a growing belief that the model was exhausted or needed radical change, especially since half the population were living under the poverty level. The NPP administration exploited this by seeking greater integration with the US corporate market and the continuation and prospective increase of massive Federal funds to Puerto Rico (rising from US\$7.5 billion in 1995 to US\$9.5 billion in 1998) (Gamaliel Ramos and Israel Rivera: 7). The problem with this strategy was the US had already legislated for the elimination of some tax exemptions to US corporations operating in the territory as of 1996, reducing the attractiveness of the territory to foreign investment, and diminishing the interest of US corporations in lobbying for its interests (and theirs) in Washington D.C. The onset of globalisation has made it worse, reducing the competitive advantages of Puerto Rico by opening its markets to competing countries in Latin America and forcing its membership in regional economic blocs which do not match its needs (Pantojas-Garcia, 2008). The result is the increasingly high profile of economic issues in the status debate and the imperative of somehow retaining the special advantages in economic development that Puerto Rico possesses vis-à-vis the USA. This cannot be guaranteed under either the integration option or the sovereign state option although it does remain more open for negotiation under a 'free association' status.

The logic of the present thus points to some form of continuing or enhanced 'free association' status. This would, in the words of Gamaliel Ramos and Israel Rivera (2001: 17) "completely fulfil the aspiration of many Puerto Ricans to have the 'best of both worlds': a blend of the empowerment of independence and the recognition of a Puerto Rican national identity, with the most beneficial aspects of permanent economic and political union with the United States". Just such an option has been a goal of one wing of the PDP since the early 1970s and the precedent does exist in the granting of 'free association' to three former US trust territories in the Pacific (Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia and the Marshall Islands), but these are much smaller as well as more distant than Puerto Rico. The real problem is the proposal has

met resistance from the US Congress which is very wary, not to say hostile, to the idea of extending it very much, if at all, beyond the present level of 'concession'. It also has to

encompass the powerful lobby of the pro-statehood movement and the desire of almost all Puerto Ricans to retain US citizenship which was granted them in 1917 and which permits “access to federally-funded programmes; free movement between the island and the mainland; and protection of some of the civil, social and political rights guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States” (Duany and Pantojas-Garcia 2005: 39-40). The merits of the case are still under consideration and a new US administration with radically new ideas may be willing to look at it. Before they do, however, agreement on a way forward as well as a formula to define it will have to be found in Puerto Rico by those who most favour it.

The Netherlands

In 1954 the Netherlands enacted the Charter of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. This provided for a Kingdom in three equal parts comprising the Netherlands, the Netherlands Antilles and Suriname which, in the words of the Preamble, “would take care of their own interests autonomously, manage communal affairs on an equal footing, and accord each other assistance” (cited in Oostindie and Klinkers, 2003: 84). Local affairs were defined as social and economic development, education and culture, and government finance while communal affairs (statutory cooperation) covered the rule of law, human rights and good governance (the last being a Kingdom obligation) that, along with foreign affairs, defence and nationality/citizenship, meant the continuing involvement of the Netherlands government. In the Netherlands Antilles there are three layers of government: the local island government, the national level (the Netherlands Antilles government) and the Kingdom. The government of the Netherlands Antilles is headed by an elected prime minister and meets in Curaçao. The Kingdom appoints a Governor who acts “as an intermediary” (De Jong, 2005: 91) representing the interests of the Kingdom (often perceived as synonymous with the interests of the Dutch government) and also of the Antillean government. It is a very complex arrangement and it is little wonder that it has proven very difficult to work in practice. Nevertheless, the Charter was approved by the UN in 1955 as a form of ‘self-government’ and decolonisation.

In spite of the propensity for in-built tensions the Charter worked well enough until 1969 when riots in Curaçao over the low level of development in the island became the catalyst for change. In Suriname an independence movement had already begun, in part motivated by dissatisfaction over the level of autonomy that was permitted, particularly in foreign relations. The Dutch government in the Netherlands now encouraged independence (it had rejected this option in the early 1950s prior to the adoption of the Charter) and Suriname became independent in 1975. The problems of Curaçao also set off an interest in Aruba for a change in status, which eventually coalesced into a demand for *status aparte* (secession from the Netherlands Antilles) while remaining within the Kingdom. The immediate response by both the Dutch and the Netherlands Antilles governments to this idea was a reaffirmation of the integrity of the Netherlands Antilles, but persistent and escalating demands by Aruba, culminating in a consultative referendum in 1977 in which 82% opted for “sovereignty within the Kingdom” (Oostindie and Klinkers, 2003: 123), eventually forced a change of position by the Dutch government. In 1983 they agreed to *status aparte*, but only on condition that Aruba would proceed to independence within ten years of the status being granted, which was finally implemented in 1986. In doing so the Dutch government had to reluctantly abandon a policy that had emerged in the 1970s of encouraging the eventual independence of the Netherlands Antilles as a unitary state of six territories. For their part neither the Netherlands Antilles nor Aruba showed any interest in this possibility. In the face of this opposition, and the difficulties it had experienced with Aruba and the Netherlands Antilles in the previous years during which no consensus could be found on the way forward,

the Dutch finally bowed to the inevitable and in 1990 accepted that independence would not be an option for the Netherlands Antilles in the foreseeable future. The expectation that Aruba would proceed to independence was also rescinded.

In the light of this the Dutch in 1991 proposed a study group to examine the modernisation of the Charter followed by a conference on the future of the Kingdom in 1993. True to form nothing came of it although the Dutch did come up with a proposal for each island to have a separate status, which was rejected in a series of referendums in the territories in 1993/1994 in favour of the continuation of the Netherlands Antilles in its then current form. But by then events in Sint Maarten were pointing to changes in the way the Charter was being interpreted. In early 1993 Sint Maarten came under 'higher supervision' by the Kingdom government (effectively direct Dutch administration) on the grounds of maladministration, corruption and the abuse of democracy. Oostindie and Klinkers note that this was "the first time since the Charter came into effect [that] Antillean autonomy had been 'overruled' by the Kingdom government" (2003: 135). It naturally met opposition from within Sint Maarten and the beginning of a movement to copy Aruba by establishing its own *status aparte*. In June 2000 a plebiscite saw 70% voting for secession from the Netherlands Antilles and separate country status within the Kingdom. In the Netherlands Antilles government as well the Dutch began intervening "in a range of areas such as the Antillean government organisation and the size of its public service, the public debt and finances, prison conditions, police operations and criminal investigation" (De Jong, 2005: 95) invoking its responsibility to ensure 'good governance' as the reason to do so. The inevitable consequence was increasing resentment in the Netherlands Antilles government plus a feeling that "the special relationship with the Netherlands had come to an end" (ibid). Finally, in May 2002 the incoming Antillean government under Etienne Ys stated: "this government will be the last of a constitutional unity of the Netherlands Antilles in its present form" and that "Sint Maarten will secede from the Netherlands Antillean constitutional entity and attain the status of a country within the Kingdom during this period of government 2002-2006" (Oostindie and Klinkers, 2003: 151).

The end of the Netherlands Antilles was finally sealed in referendums held in 2004 in four of the territories and in 2005 in Curaçao. Only Sint Eustatius voted to maintain the Netherlands Antilles. In Sint Maarten 69% voted for a separate status as an autonomous country within the Kingdom as did 68% in Curaçao. In Saba and Bonaire 86% and 59.5% respectively voted for a direct constitutional relationship with the Netherlands (De Jong, 2005: 99). In 2005 all parties agreed that the Netherlands Antilles should be dissolved following changes of status. In 2006 the Dutch agreed to a new constitutional relationship with Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba (the BES islands) where they would become separate 'public authorities' within the Netherlands (administered by the Netherlands but with some local government functions) loosely following the French model (an option considered but rejected prior to the adoption of the Charter). Curaçao and Sint Maarten were to become separate countries in the Kingdom, following the Aruban model, but with less autonomy than it had. Financial supervision by the Kingdom was also proposed and reluctantly accepted by the island councils in both Sint Maarten and Curaçao, the latter by a very narrow majority. These objections have delayed the date changes could be finally effected beyond the end of 2008 as planned to 2010 or even later. The Netherlands Antilles public debt of Euro 2.3 billion (Euro 13,000 per capita) was to be forgiven, but only on condition that future public borrowing would be limited and that the islands cooperate with each other on law enforcement. Both these requirements mean that the Dutch government will maintain its supervisory role into the future (De Jong, 2008)

The Charter tested the limits of autonomy and points to difficulties in operationalising it in practice. It remains in place, however, and will continue to structure government in Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten. The impetus for autonomy will thus continue as will the in-built tensions between the Caribbean ‘partners’ and the Dutch government.

Some of the issues, such as action against drug trafficking and the control of immigration from the Netherlands Antilles, have already been signalled and are proving controversial. This may encourage the ‘countries’ to seek independence or even to explore the possibility of becoming part of the Netherlands, though given their relatively greater size than the BES islands this is unlikely. In the meantime, some form of cooperation among all six within the Caribbean will have to be developed. It is not at all clear what form this will take but what is clear is that it will somehow have to satisfy both the intensely insular identity of each island and common interests and shared responsibilities, an almost impossible task if their history is a guide.

Is Autonomy the Future?

The thrust of developments so far is that ‘autonomy’ is very much alive and well in the Caribbean. It can have different forms and different emphases. For example, culture and identity are much more important to the French DOM and Puerto Rico than they are to the Caribbean Overseas Territories (COTs), although they matter to them as well. Equally, direct economic benefits in the form of subsidies and entitlements are essential to some (the French DOM, the Netherlands Antilles and Puerto Rico) but not to others (the COTs except Montserrat), although in the British case there are substantial indirect economic benefits deriving from the status and underpinning the OFCs. Insularity is found everywhere, underpinning particularity and limiting cooperation among the various groups, with it being the most acute in Aruba and the Netherlands Antilles where animosity between the various islands has undermined common arrangements between them and ultimately acted to limit their autonomy from the Netherlands.

The argument so far is also that ‘greater autonomy’ is the preferred option of nearly all the territories. This must be qualified in the case of Puerto Rico where the statehood option sees integration with the US as a final resolution of the status issue, although even here a measure of autonomy is likely to be a feature of any solution in the unlikely event that statehood is realised. The same applies to the BES islands although here real autonomy from the Netherlands will be more difficult to argue and sustain following the eventual gaining of ‘municipal’ status. So is further autonomy possible and will it lead to a final resolution of the status issue in the Caribbean?

There are several arguments to suggest that it will be difficult and that it may not. The first is whether greater autonomy resolves the issue for the people of the territory. The form of autonomy that most seek to aspire to is summarised above in the section on Puerto Rico where it appears as ‘a path towards a sovereign status which could lead to free association’. The models in mind appear to be the Cook Islands (population 21,993) and Niue (1,444) on the one hand and the three former US trust territories of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) (107,665), the Marshall Islands (63,174), and Palau (21,093) on the other. The Cook Islands have been ‘self-governing’ in ‘free association’ with New Zealand since 1965 and Niue since 1974. They are fully responsible for their internal affairs and, in most respects, for their external affairs where their own ‘international personality’ is important. The Cook Islands as of 2005 therefore had diplomatic relations in its own name with eighteen countries. The status has been likened to “a form of independence which may or may not prove in the

long-run to have something added” (Quentin Baxter, 1994: 3). The arrangement has not been without its problems for all parties but it has stood the test of time reasonably well.

Broadly similar arrangements apply to the former US trust territories which adopted ‘compacts of free association’ with the USA in 1986. They manage their internal affairs and are ‘sovereign’ in external affairs and hence full members of the United Nations, with security and defence ‘shared’ with the USA. Similar to the Cook Islands and Niue with New Zealand they have a common currency with the metropole, benefit from relatively high levels of grant assistance, and free movement to the metropole without immigration restrictions. Again, some problems have arisen and in 2004 an ‘amended’ Compact of Association was agreed between the FSM and the Marshall Islands, the terms of which provided for continuing assistance by the US until 2023. Unsurprisingly, some other US territories have seen much merit in these arrangements and Carlyle Corbin (1988) was an early advocate of such a status for the US Virgin Islands. There can be, however, economic, social and cultural costs as Quentin Baxter notes in the Cook Islands and Niue. The economic costs of diplomatic representation and the domestic fulfilment of international treaties and obligations can be very high (as also can the consequences of poor governance in the economic regulation of OFCs), while the effect of open immigration to the metropole can seriously erode the cultural norms and traditional way of life raising questions of long-term viability (in the case of Niue).

The second question is whether the metropole will agree to ‘sovereign status with free association’ in the Caribbean. The French are unlikely to permit it. While they have been prepared to be reasonably flexible in the South Pacific it is only recently they have done so in the Caribbean with the limited changes in status for Saint Barthelemy and Saint Martin. More tellingly, the changes introduced within the new French Constitution in 2003 have, according to Nathalie Mrgudovic (2005: 76-77), ruled out the right for self-determination outside the French Republic for the French Caribbean, although this assertion would be contested by some. It is, however, on recent evidence an unlikely prospect in the DOM. The British also will not permit it. The earlier section on British policy shows strong resistance to the idea at the ministerial level extending even to the granting of a constitution to the Caribbean OTs permitting the level of autonomy currently given to Bermuda. The options are thus limited variants of the current status (essentially the status quo) or independence. Similar considerations apply in the case of the Netherlands and the US. In a conference on the ‘non-independent’ Caribbean held in Puerto Rico in April 2008 (Clegg and Pantojas-Garcia: 2008) ‘official’ views from both metropolises provided objection to ‘sovereign autonomy’. In the Dutch case it was clear that debt forgiveness would be allowed only with safeguards determined by the Dutch and that co-operation between the five former partners in law enforcement was an essential requirement. The degree of autonomy given to Aruba would not be offered and the independence option would be kept open (although the Charter prevents the Dutch from unilaterally imposing it). In the US case the options were also seen as essentially limited to statehood, Commonwealth status or independence. Some greater ‘free association’ might be possible within the Commonwealth status but the US would retain the right to terminate it at will (as would Puerto Rico should it seek change). The US Congress would be reluctant to concede any real ‘sovereignty’ to Puerto Rico since its constitutional doctrines were opposed to ‘dualism’, although it would be prepared to continue to give rights such as citizenship provided they were in the end of little or no consequence to it. As such, ‘compacts of free association’ modelled on the Pacific example seem unlikely to be agreed.

The final issue is the position of the UN. The UN continues to maintain a Special Committee on Decolonisation to promote self-determination within the sixteen countries it

identifies as non-self governing, seven of which are in the Caribbean. It also continues to offer the three modes of self-determination set out in Resolution 1541 (or as set out in Resolution 2625, 1970, “the emergence into any other political status freely determined by a people” (cited in Mrgudovic, 2005: 66). The problem is that the work of the Decolonisation Committee has been effectively ‘stalled’ for some fifteen years and subject to pressure from the UK and the US in particular to allow as ‘decolonisation’ the modernisation rather than the termination of their colonial presence. To date this process of what has been termed “colonial accommodation” (Overseas Territories Report, 2007: 6) has been resisted, not least by some independent countries in the Caribbean who continue to raise the issue within the UN (BBC Caribbean, 2007) and on occasion by some ‘non self-governing’ Caribbean countries in the Special Committee’s biennial Caribbean Regional Seminar, the most recent of which was held in Grenada in May 2007. The idea of the UN Special Committee on Decolonisation taking a leading role in vigorously promoting ‘sovereign autonomy’ must thus be discounted at present, although some pressures will remain within the Caribbean for it to do so through the activities of the sovereign Caribbean countries (not the territorial, as they remain circumscribed by their relationship to the colonial power) within the UN system.

In conclusion, while greater levels of autonomy has its exponents within the various Caribbean territories it has its detractors within the metropole. The prospects for any real advance on current levels of autonomy must be judged as small, particularly if it moves toward the exercise of ‘sovereign autonomy’ without metropolitan oversight and final approval. It has also been found wanting in the past. The greatest level of autonomy granted was to the Netherlands Antilles and this failed for many reasons, some of which have been cited above. This raises the question of whether the real issue is not greater autonomy but better autonomy. This is an area where both the territory and the metropole can quite easily find common ground, although the perpetual contestation over ‘who does what’ will remain as an ever present source of tension and ultimately dissatisfaction, leading to demands for changes in status. In some cases this will mean independence and in a few others the prospect of integration. In both these options, self-determination has proven to be ‘final’. Autonomy is not, as the experiences of both the British with the Associated States of the Commonwealth Caribbean and the Dutch with Suriname as part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands demonstrate. In this sense autonomy, in whatever current form, remains not the ‘best of both worlds’ as it is sometimes portrayed but as a transient ‘half-way house’ to somewhere else, unless real attempts are made to give it a substance it does not yet have.

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